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THE WRECK OF THE STEAM YACHT ZOE.—Page 85.

WRECKED ON SPIDER ISLAND;

OR,

HOW NED ROGERS FOUND THE TREASURE

By JAMES OTIS,

Author of "The Castaways," "Runaway Brig," "Search for the Silver City," "With Lafayette at Yorktown," "Treasure Finders," etc., etc.

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WRECKED ON SPIDER ISLAND.

CHAPTER I.

NED ROGERS.

Ned Rogers had but few acquaintances in the city of Portland, Maine; but those few were positive the boy had run away from home.

It was quite natural such should be the general idea among those who saw him trying from day to day to earn the small amount of money necessary to provide him with food.

As a matter of course it was essential he should also have clothes and a bed at night; but Ned had found it such hard work to get sufficient to satisfy his hunger that it would have seemed a willful waste of money to expend it on anything save provisions.

He very often found shelter in the store-houses on the wharves where he sought employment. Sometimes the crew of a fishing vessel would allow him to remain on board during the night, and more than once did he walk around the streets because of his inability to go elsewhere.

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As for clothing, the badly patched suit he wore, which had originally been made for a full-sized man, was quite as much as he aspired to until "luck came his way," and to have new garments was a dream he never allowed himself to indulge in, because of the apparent impossibility.

Now, while Ned presented every indication of a boy who has run away from home in order to better his fortunes, and wishes heartily that he could run back, he had never been so foolish, for the simple reason that so long as he could remember there was no home for him in all this wide world.

His first remembrance of anything even approaching an abiding-place was when he had reached his fifth birthday, and then understood he was supported by an uncle, who seldom lost an opportunity of telling him what a useless article he was, more especially on a farm.

After that he remembered a funeral, with his uncle in the coffin, and from the moment the hard-hearted farmer was carried to his last resting-place Ned's journeyings began.

First one neighbor and then another had some work by which he could earn enough to pay for the small amount he ate, and finally, as he grew older, even these opportunities ceased.

He did not know that he had a single relative in

the world to whom he could go, and while perfectly willing and even anxious to work, the townspeople called him a "lazy good-for-nothing, whose only desire was to eat the bread of idleness."

"It's mighty little of any kind of bread I get," Ned once said to Deacon Grout, when the latter had made use of this remark because the boy applied to him for work. "I allers have done whatever I could find that would give me a square meal or a place to sleep; but it looks as if you folks wasn't willin' to spare that much. I s'pose you think a feller like me oughter pay for the privilege of stayin' in this blamed old town."

There is no question but that Ned's provocation was great, yet it was an ill-advised remark, for from that day he not only had the reputation of being lazy, but impudent as well.

The deacon predicted he would "come to some bad end," and the deacon's friends fully expected each morning to hear that "the Rogers boy" had been sent to jail, because of having committed some terrible crime.

Despite this very unpleasant and unsatisfactory method of gaining less than half a livelihood, Ned remained in the town until he was fourteen years old; not for love of the place, but owing to his inability to leave.

The city was so far away that he did not think it possible to walk, and as for paying his fare on the stage-coach, he might just as well have cried for the moon.

The cost of riding from Jonesboro to Portland, in both stage and cars, was $7, and Ned had never been the possessor of a tenth part of that amount, although he was really as industrious as the townspeople would allow him to be.

From the day he was ten years old the unhappy boy had said to himself that he would go to the city at the first opportunity; but as the weeks went by and he could see no possibility of carrying out such a plan, he grew discouraged.

"I expect what the deacon said will come true," he thought, "an' it won't be my fault. The people ain't willin' to give me a job, an' if I do get a chance now an' then, nobody wants to pay cash."

It was when the future looked darkest, and he had begun to ask himself whether it would not be possible for him to walk to Portland, even though the distance was more than two hundred miles, that the longed-for opportunity arrived.

A drover passed through the town, or was about to do so, with a hundred head of cattle, when one of his drivers was taken sick, and he inquired for some one to fill the man's place.

The stock was to be driven to the nearest shipping point on the railroad, and from there taken by cars to Portland.

Ned heard of the drover's necessities and applied for the situation, agreeing to do the work, provided he was taken as far as the city and supplied with food during the journey.

On such terms there was but little difficulty in making a trade, and the boy left his native town, determined never to return until he could show Deacon Grout and his friends that it was possible for him to rise in the world when he was among those who would allow him an opportunity.

The journey, slow and fatiguing though it was, delighted Ned.

Everything around him was strange and wonderful, and those with whom he came in contact treated him like a human being, which was a pleasing contrast to his experience in Jonesboro.

The other drivers told him of what could be seen in the great world to which he was going, and related more than one story of poor boys who had started out to seek their fortunes under even more distressing circumstances than those from which he suffered, coming back some day rich and respected, until he began to think it was only necessary to gain the city in order to be wealthy.

With such dreams as these was his time occupied, and when the journey was finally finished he began to look around for one of those very charitable men whom he fancied were waiting in large cities to welcome, with outstretched arms and plenty of money, all poor boys.

As a matter of course he found nothing of the kind, and before forty-eight hours had passed began to realize that the people in one place were very much like those in all others.

No one seemed to have any especial interest in him, and it was quite as difficult to find an opportunity to work in the city as in the country.

After the first day he understood that there would be but little chance for him to get an engagement in a store while his clothing was in such a condition, and he relinquished that portion of his plans to seek work around the docks.

Here he succeeded in earning about as much as while in Jonesboro; but his life was more pleasant because he was treated more like a human being and less as a criminal.

During the summer season it made but little difference where he slept; but winter was near at hand, and it became absolutely necessary he should make such arrangements as would provide himself with a shelter.

Until this time he had resolutely set his mind against going to sea, for he was quite certain it would not be an agreeable life, and there would be but little chance for him, without influence, to rise above the level of a sailor.

"It's no use, I've got to try it," he said to himself one morning when, after sleeping under a pile of lumber on a pier, he awakened to find everything covered with hoar-frost. "I'm pretty nigh frozen now, an' what'll be the position of affairs in another month?"

Having once determined his course, Ned lost no time in acting upon it.

He was very well acquainted with the water-front of the city and knew where to find vessels bound for a foreign port.

Since it seemed necessary for him to go to sea he did not intend to ship on board a fishing vessel or one engaged in the coast-wise trade, for the very good reason that in such craft he would not receive sufficient advance to purchase the much-needed outfit.

The brig Evening Star was loading for Manila, and this seemed to him the proper kind of a voyage to take. When the trip was ended he would have wages enough due him, provided he spent no money except for clothing, to admit of making himself presentable for a situation in a store.

Captain Bragg was on the quarter-deck talking with one of his officers when Ned clambered over the side and stood by the port rail amidships waiting until the master of the brig should be at leisure to speak with him.

"What do you want?" the captain asked five minutes later when, the interview having come to an end, he condescended to notice the boy.

"I'd like to ship on this brig if you need a boy."

"What can you do?"

"Almost anything in the cabin; but I don't believe I'd make much of a fist goin' aloft."

"So you're no sailor, but want to go to sea?"

"I had rather stay on shore, sir; but I can't get a job, so made up my mind to try it aboard ship if any one is willin' to take a green hand."

"What about wages?"

"I'll leave that to you, sir, providin' I can have advance enough to give me a decent fittin' out. These clothes I've got on are all I own, an' I reckon more'n them will be needed before the brig gets back."

"Would you like to ship as cabin boy?"

"At what wages, sir?"

"Ten dollars a month and an advance of two months' wages out of the slop-chest."

Ned did not understand that by taking his outfit

from the vessel's stores he might be forced to pay a great deal more than the same articles would cost ashore, and readily engaged on those terms.

"Here, Mr. Stout, see that this boy gets what he needs from the chest, and then set him to work cleaning up the cabin," the captain said to the first officer, and the latter motioned for Ned to follow him.

Leading the way below he brought out a pair of woolen trousers, two shirts and a reefing jacket, which he gave to Ned as he said:

"So you're goin' to sea, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"First voyage?"

"Yes, sir."

"Run away from home, I reckon."

"No, sir; I've never had any since I can remember, an' if I knew of one you wouldn't see me here. I've only shipped because I can't help myself. This livin' on wind ain't what it's cracked up to be, an' I want to get under cover for the winter."

Mr. Stout looked at the boy almost pityingly, and said half to himself:

"It's kinder tough to strike this pertic'lar craft on the first cruise."

"Isn't she a sound vessel, sir?" Ned asked, fearful lest there might be good reason for him to remain ashore.

"Oh, yes," the mate replied quickly, looking like one who fancies he has been so indiscreet as to say too much. "There's nothin' wrong with the Evenin' Star. I was thinkin' of somethin' else when I spoke. Get inter them clothes so I can show you where to go to work. I reckon the duds you've taken off will be about fit to throw overboard; they wouldn't hang together many days longer."

Ned would have insisted on knowing what the mate meant by his words in reference to the vessel; but that gentleman did not appear inclined to continue the conversation, and the boy was forced to follow him into the cabin without the desired information.

Ten minutes later Ned had forgotten that anything odd or unusual had been said, so interested was he in his work.

The cabin was in a shockingly dirty condition, and he resolved to put it so thoroughly to rights that the captain could not fail to be pleased at having hired such an industrious boy.

He had had no breakfast; but the loss of a meal was something to which he was accustomed, having missed more than he got while on shore, therefore this trifling matter did not disturb him.

When noon came he had not finished, and the cook insisted that he stop until dinner should be served.

As a matter of course he obeyed, and was assisting in laying the table when the captain entered.

"Is this what you call cleaning the cabin?" he cried in a rage, pointing to a pile of dirt which Ned had left in one corner until he finished sweeping.

"I only stopped to help set the table, sir," Ned replied promptly, little thinking there could be any cause for complaint. "I shall be all through before supper-time."

"How many hours do you want on a job like this?" the captain asked angrily.

"I'm getting along right well, sir; but it was so dirty that a feller couldn't make his work show till he was almost through."

"You've got too much chin to suit me," the captain cried, and at that instant Ned was forced to pass very near the man, who appeared as if trying to make himself angry when no reason for a display of temper existed.

Conscious that he had not offended in any way, Ned hardly expected to receive punishment, therefore was wholly unprepared for what followed.

The captain struck him a vicious blow which sent him headlong toward the companion-way at the very instant the cook was descending with a basin of hot soup.

As a matter of course Ned had no control over

his own movements, neither had the cook, and the result was that the two came together with a force and suddenness which sent both to the floor, the scalding liquid flowing over their faces and limbs.

"What do you mean by that?" the captain cried, as running swiftly toward the injured boy, he seized him by the coat-collar, struck him on the face several times with full force, and then hurled him to the deck above. "I'll teach you to spoil my dinner!"

Ned did not hear this last remark. His head had struck against one of the rail stanchions, and he lay unconscious, while the captain turned the vials of his wrath on the unoffending steward.

When the new cabin-boy recovered his senses he was in the galley and the cook was applying oil and flour to the blisters on his own face and hands.

"What was you doin' when the captain came in?" the master of the galley asked.

"Nothin' more'n you saw. I'd been to work all the forenoon, an' only stopped when you wanted me to help set the table. I can't tell what made him fly at me so."

"It's a way he has when he gets two or three drinks aboard," the cook replied with a smothered threat. "One of these days he'll try that trick too often."

"Did he do anything to you?"

"Not so very much," and the man pulled up his trousers to show two ugly bruises on his leg. "That's where he caught me before I could get on to my feet."

"Did you say anything?"

"It don't pay to do very much chinnin' when the captain is around," was the sage reply; "but he's got to carry sail different from this, or the Evening Star won't have a cook on board when she leaves port."

"He can hunt for another cabin-boy mighty quick," Ned said angrily. "I'm willin' to do my work or stand a flogging, but he shan't knock me down when I'm trying my best."

"I don't see how you can help yourself now."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothin' except that you've shipped, an' it won't be so easy to get away, for the police would arrest you on his complaint."

"But I haven't reg'larly shipped."

"Oh, yes, you have. The minute you received what they handed out from the slop-chest you was one of the crew. It's a case now of makin' the best of it, and if you take my advice you'll show up bright and smilin' when he sends for you."

It was only natural Ned should be very angry

because of the cruel and undeserved treatment; but before the cook finished giving him good advice he realized that there was nothing left but to make the best of a bad job, since without money or friends it would be very difficult to avoid going to sea in the Evening Star, in case the captain insisted on his remaining aboard.

CHAPTER II.

AT SEA.

NED was not fit for duty during this day and the next.

Both his eyes were blackened, his cheek cut and swollen, and his face blistered in several places.

After ministering to his necessities as well as possible, the cook carried him into the forecastle, and there, alone, he had ample opportunity to reflect upon what kind of a life he might be forced to lead while it was necessary he should remain aboard the brig.

On the evening of the first day, the chief mate, Bob Stout, came below to inquire how the boy felt, and before he had been in the ill-smelling place five minutes Ned decided that he should like this officer, no matter how brutal the others might be.

"Got knocked 'round pretty lively for a few minutes, eh?" the mate said in a cheery tone as he seated himself on a chest by the side of Ned's bunk.

"Indeed I did, an' all for nothin'. I was doin'

the best I knew when he begun, an' then how could I help tumblin' the cook over when the captain fired me at him?"

"You don't want to bother your head about that, my lad. The least said in such cases is the soonest mended. A boy at sea must learn to hold his tongue."

"Even when he's gettin' a floggin' he don't deserve?"

"Of course; that's the very time when it's most dangerous to talk. You'll soon get used to the captain's ways."

"It'll take a mighty long while for me to get used to bein' fired from one end of the cabin to the other, an' then on deck."

"Wait three weeks, an' see what you say about it. I went to sea as boy with a master who was as liberal with his blows as Captain Bragg; but I got in the habit of dodgin' 'em before we'd been outside three days, an' after that it was fairly smooth sailin', except when he caught me unawares."

"But there's no reason why I should stay on board. I'd rather starve ashore than have the best of everything that's on this craft."

"The cook says he told you what risks you'd be takin' by tryin' to run away."

"So he did; but I won't believe that man can keep me here if I don't want to stay."

"He can, an' all the cook said is true. The only thing left for you is to make the best of it, an' get along as easy a possible. Now cheer up, an' have some heart in you."

With these words the mate left the forecastle, and Ned turned the advice over in his mind until he came to the conclusion that it would be better to act upon the friendly hints.

The result of this conversation was that on the following afternoon the cabin-boy returned to duty by taking up the task which had been left unfinished when the unprovoked attack was made upon him.

The captain entered shortly after the work was recommenced, but made no comment whatever. He did not deign to so much as look at the little fellow, and when the evening meal was served Ned succeeded in waiting upon the table without a mishap.

After the third day came to an end the new cabin-boy felt quite well at home. He had remembered the mate's advice in the matter of dodging blows, and on several occasions avoided what might otherwise have been as serious as the first flogging.

Finally the time came when the Evening Star was ready for sea, and Ned congratulated himself upon the fact, for, once under way, it was hardly

probable the captain would have a great deal of time to devote to him.

His first experience at sea was so much like what other fellows, who have ventured upon the ocean for sport rather than from necessity, have known, that there is no reason why it should be given in detail here.

The brig sailed out of the harbor in the early morning, and before twelve o'clock poor Ned was in the forecastle believing his last hour was very near at hand. It seemed to him that the sailors were a particularly hard-hearted set of men to laugh and make sport of a dying boy, for he was fully convinced he would not live until morning.

Death was not as near as he had fancied, however, although he did not feel very much better at sunrise.

Then the mate came into the forecastle, and, after asking how he felt, said :

" You had best come aft, lad. The room off the pantry is the proper bunk for you, and once clear of this foul place you'll get well a great deal faster."

" Where is the captain ?"

" In his room. He hasn't turned out yet, and you'll have a chance to get settled in the new quarters before he shows up."

Ned was more than willing to make the proposed change. The odor, the jokes of the sailors, as well as the fumes of tobacco smoke, were decidedly trying to a weak stomach, and he managed to crawl from the berth unaided, thanks to the promise of an improvement in the surroundings.

Mr. Stout so far unbent from the dignity of a first officer as to assist him across the deck and into the tiny room which was half-filled with stores of various kinds; but, regardless of the limited accommodations, Ned felt he was very fortunate in getting quarters where he could be alone.

"I shall see that you show up to-morrow morning," the mate said as he turned to go. "I don't reckon the captain will let you loaf any longer, even though a sick waiter isn't the most pleasant person one can have around a table. The skipper of this craft don't believe in keeping cats that can't catch mice."

"Do you s'pose he'll let me stay here as long as that?" Ned asked piteously.

"I reckon so, for I shall make it out you're worse off than really is the case; so fix yourself as comfortable as possible, an' I'll see to it that the cook brings you a bowl of soup before noon."

"I couldn't eat a mouthful."

"Nonsense. You'll be as ravenous as a bear by

night, an' I'll answer for it you can get away with quite a mess by the time it is ready."

Ned felt certain he should never again want anything in the way of food; but when, two hours later, the captain of the galley brought a bowlful of liquid, steaming hot, which gave forth a most appetizing odor, he succeeded in swallowing more than half of it, feeling very much better immediately afterward.

By nightfall he had so far recovered that the nausea did not trouble him, save when he attempted to rise to his feet, and he had no difficulty in eating a large piece of meat and two ship's biscuit, which the good-natured mate gave him.

"I reckon you're all right now, an' shall turn you out bright an' early in the morning," Mr. Stout said as Ned literally devoured the provisions.

"Did the captain say anything because I was sick so long?"

"Yes, he got into a reg'lar mad fit; but I made it out that you wasn't able to come into the cabin in any decent shape, an' he didn't say any more. The old man has been like an angel all day, an' I can't understand the meanin' of it. Anybody would say he was tryin' to play me for some kind of a favor; but of course that can't be, now we've put to sea."

It was destined Ned should know very soon what the "favor" was which Captain Bragg wanted of the mate, although he little dreamed then that it would cause him so much alarm.

From the time Mr. Stout left him until late in the night Ned slept soundly, and then he was awakened by hearing the familiar voice of the captain say in a loud tone just outside the door of his stateroom :

"There's no need of your bein' on deck for the next half-hour, Mr. Stout, so let's go into the pantry for some grog. That lazy steward hasn't left any in the cabin."

"I'll bring it to you there, sir, if you'll wait a a minute."

"There's no occasion for it. We can go in here as well, and there'll be less chance any one overhears us while we're talking."

Ned heard the door of the pantry opened, and then it was as if the captain had entered the boy's room, so far as the latter's ability to hear all that might be said was concerned.

The partition between the two apartments was composed of only one thickness of thin boards, and a whisper would have sounded distinct in the confined space.

"It seems rather odd to see the captain of a craft

like this huntin' his own lunch," Mr. Stout said laughingly.

"I'd rather do it just now while the second officer is in his room, for I've got something private to say to you which wouldn't be safe even in the cabin."

There was a few moments of silence, and then the mate said, as if about to partake of some liquor:

"Here's to your health, sir."

"Same to you," was the reply; and then it was possible for Ned to hear the sound as the glasses were replaced on the shelves.

"Mr. Stout," the captain began in a serious tone, "I believe you are not a rich man."

"There's no question about that, sir, for I'm even poorer than a churchmouse."

"How would you like a chance to make a thousand dollars or more of extra money this trip?"

"There's precious little need of my answerin' such a question, sir. I never had a thousand dollars at one time in my life."

"What would you be willing to do in order to get that much within the next two months?"

"Without stealin' it, do you mean, sir?"

"It isn't likely I'd ask you to turn thief; but if this craft never reached Manila there might be more than that in your pocket."

"Do you mean to wreck her?" Mr. Stout cried as if in alarm.

"Hush! Don't make such talk so loud that everybody on board can hear you."

"It strikes me there are worse things than stealing," the mate said slowly.

"But this isn't one of them. The brig is insured way up on what ain't in the hold, and suppose she founders off the Florida Keys, who is going to be any the wiser? There's no need that even the men should know, providing you and I work together, and we can take to the boats without a smell of danger."

"It is a clear case of cheating somebody, even though we don't risk the lives of the crew."

"Nonsense! Every cent will come from the rich insurance companies, and you can't say that is wronging any one in particular. What would be the difference to a stock company which rolls up thousands of dollars in profits every year, if they had to pay an extra risk or two? It's such a chance for us as a man seldom gets in this world, and we'll take it if you say the word."

There was quite a long interval of silence, and then Ned heard Mr. Stout ask:

"Have you made your preparations for scuttling her?"

"No, there wasn't need of that until you and I had come to an understanding; and even then we don't want to do anything until we're off the Keys where there'll be no very great tumbling around in the boats."

"How is it to be done?"

"We'll scuttle her from the stern. I've seen to it the cargo was stowed in such a manner that we can get down to her skin without any trouble. It might be a slight explosion in the forward hold—not enough to do any damage, but sufficient to start the men into a panic—would work to our advantage."

"I don't like it," the chief mate said in the tone of one who is willing to be convinced; "but there's a pleasant ring to a thousand dollars."

"Of course there is, and your share will be even more than that."

"It isn't so easy to scuttle a craft as one might think, and when the job was done if some of the crew should happen to be suspicious, we'd stand a good chance of takin' a trip to prison."

"If anything like that should happen at the last minute it would be unlucky for the man who saw us, or thought we were up to mischief. He shouldn't leave this craft alive. I'd rather send the whole crew to the bottom than run a risk of being

caught at such a job. But take another drink Stout, an' think over this matter till morning. There's plenty of time to discuss it, for we've got at least four days before us, if not a week."

Then the conversation ceased as the captain left the pantry, and Ned heard the mate, who had remained behind an instant, mutter to himself:

"I knew the old man was up to something, or he wouldn't have been so sweet for the last twenty-four hours. It's a big scheme he's got, an' I don't see why it couldn't be worked without trouble. A thousand dollars is a pile of money to a man who never had any more than I've got."

This was sufficient to show Ned that the chief officer would not hesitate to assist in wrecking the brig, provided it could be done without taking too big a risk, and the boy began to wonder what would become of him if the crime was finally committed.

The captain had said that if any one on board had a suspicion the brig was deliberately scuttled, such person should never leave the craft alive.

Now Ned was in the possession of the secret, and in case the captain discovered that his words could be heard so plainly from one apartment to the other, it was only reasonable to suppose he would carry his threat into execution, more especially

when it was a person of so little importance as a cabin-boy without a relative in the world.

"I don't believe Mr. Stout would do such a thing to me," Ned said to himself; "but I'll talk with him about it the first chance I get."

It was impossible for Ned to sleep any more on this night, and next morning there was no reason why the chief mate should awaken him, for he was at work in the cabin as soon as the first gray light of the coming dawn could be seen.

"Feelin' better, eh?" Mr. Stout asked as he came below while Ned was placing the dishes on the table preparatory to serving breakfast.

"Yes, sir, an' I'll be able to do my work now if I don't get taken again."

"There isn't much chance of that. You've served an apprenticeship, and won't have any more trouble this voyage."

Then the mate went into the pantry for some of the same liquid which had played an important part in the conversation during the previous night, for it is as strange as it is true that as soon as a man contemplates villainy of almost any kind, he invariably flies for courage and consolation to liquor.

Ned made up his mind to speak with the mate that very morning in reference to what he had heard; but the opportunity was denied him.

Before the first officer returned from the pantry the captain came out of his room, and the two spent considerable time at the forward end of the cabin conversing in whispers.

Then breakfast was served, after which Mr. Stout went to his apartment, and there was so much work for the cabin boy to do that he had not finished when it was time to prepare for dinner.

The captain was in such a good humor during the noon-day meal that Ned was not even reprimanded when he tripped over a chair and spilled a portion of a cup of coffee, and after dinner the master and his mate went into the pantry once more.

The cabin boy was tempted to enter his own room in order to hear what was said, for most likely the mate was giving an answer to the question asked; but the risk of being detected was so great that he did not venture on any such hazardous experiment.

No until his work in the cabin was finished did the two emerge from their conference, and then it was apparent that Mr, Stout had agreed to join the captain in the commission of the crime. The master of the Evening Star was evidently on the best of terms with his mate, and the two showed very plainly that they had a secret in common.

"If I don't talk with Mr. Stout pretty soon he'll

be jest as bad as the captain," Ned said to himself as he noted the change which had come over the mate during the past few hours. "I'll watch my chance to-night after the old man has turned in, for if this thing is to be done inside of a week the best way is to get ready for the worst right soon."

The captain did not interfere with the new boy on this day, and had it not been for the short but sharp experience before putting to sea, Ned would have believed he was sailing under one of the most amiable men to be found in the world.

When night came the cabin boy finished his tasks as quickly as possible and then went on deck, where he remained by the rail amidships until after the first officer had had another interview with the captain in the pantry.

"What are you doing out here?" Mr. Stout asked as he came on deck, and since he knew the officer was willing to commit a crime, Ned fancied his voice had lost that cheery ring which pleased him so much when he first heard it. "Ain't gettin' homesick, are you?"

"How can a feller feel like that when he hasn't got any home to go to?" Ned asked with a mirthless laugh. "All the same, I wish I was on shore."

"Why? You seem to be gettin' along well enough here."

"I am so far as the work goes; but there's more that's worryin' me."

"What is it, lad? You're too young to have very big troubles."

"If you'd promise me somethin' I'd feel a good deal better."

"Then out with it, for a boy like you don't want to keep anything very serious on his mind too long at a time."

Ned looked around to make certain there was no one in the immediate vicinity who could overhear him, and whispered:

"Will you promise that I shan't be left behind when you sink the brig?"

Mr. Stout started as if having received a heavy blow from a weapon, and an instant later grasped Ned by the arm with sufficient force to cause considerable pain, as he asked in a hoarse whisper:

"What do you mean by that, lad? Where did you learn anything of the kind?"

"You was talkin' in the pantry, an' I could hear every word while I was sick in my room."

"Come here! Let's find out jest how easy that can be done," and in his excitement the chief mate dragged Ned roughly into the pantry. "Now you speak here, while I go where you was."

An instant later the boy heard him say from the opposite side of the partition:

"Now go ahead, an' talk low."

"You can hear me if I whisper," Ned replied, suiting the action to the words.

An exclamation of surprise and dismay told that the mate was convinced of the truth of the story related by Ned.

Coming into the pantry once more he said sternly:

"Now I want you to go over everything you heard us say! Don't skip a single word more'n you can help, for this is gettin' to be a serious matter."

Wondering why Mr. Stout should have allowed himself to become so excited, the boy obeyed, saying in conclusion:

"You won't let the captain leave me behind, will you, Mr. Stout? You know he threatened that was what he'd do to any one who had a suspicion the brig was sunk by him, an' I'm afraid he may find out I could hear all you said."

The mate looked at the boy very oddly for a few seconds, and then replied in a voice which trembled despite all his efforts to make it sound firm:

"I'll see you're not left here in case she is scuttled; but I reckon the best thing we can do now will be to give up that job, since there's another besides ourselves who knows about it."

"Who do you mean?"

"You, of course," and the mate spoke as if in a rage.

"But you know I wouldn't tell."

"No, we must take good care of that," and to steady his shaken nerves the mate had recourse to the liquor bottle, pouring out for himself a dram which very nearly filled the glass.

"You see I thought it was best to speak to you about it the first chance for if it is to be done so soon I might wait too long," Ned continued, little fancying what thoughts were in the mate's mind.

"That is right, lad. I'm glad you did, an' now we'd better go on deck. See to it that you don't stay up too late to-night, for you must be on hand bright an' early in the mornin' to have things ready for breakfast."

"I'm goin' to my room now. I only went on deck to speak with you."

"All right; but be sure you don't get to talkin' with anybody else about what you heard, or there might come a row which wouldn't be pleasant."

"There's no danger of that," Ned replied cheerily, perfectly contented in mind since having spoken on the subject to the man whom he felt certain was his friend.

Mr. Stout was so attentive as to go with the boy

to the door of his room, and when Ned was inside, the mate turned the key without the knowledge of the young occupant.

Then Mr. Stout visited the pantry once more, poured out another glass of liquor for the purpose of steadying his nerves, and muttered to himself as he went on deck:

"The skipper must hear of this before morning. It won't do to let that kid run around the craft with such a secret as he has got; but the question is how we can put him out of the way?"

CHAPTER III.

THE PLOT.

MEANWHILE Ned was positive that everything had been arranged satisfactorily.

It never came into his mind that Mr. Stout might think it in the highest degree unsafe for a boy to be possessed of a secret which could send him and the captain to prison for a long term. His only idea was that in case the brig was scuttled he would be in no danger, and this was sufficient for the time being.

There was no occasion for him to leave his room, therefore he had no intimation he had been made a prisoner, and lay down to sleep with not a care on his mind, save, possibly, whether he should succeed in pleasing the captain as well on the following day as during the one just passed.

Matters would have worn a very different complexion to him had it been possible to have overheard the conversation which Mr. Stout had with the captain in the latter's room about midnight, when the second mate went on deck.

The master of the Evening Star was wrapped in a slumber superinduced by frequent draughts from the liquor bottle, and his chief officer had some difficulty in awakening him.

"What's the matter?" he cried in alarm when finally it was possible for the visitor to make his presence known. "Anything wrong?"

"Not with the brig; but there's some one aboard who must be attended to mighty quick if you count on carrying out the plan we spoke about the other night."

"What do you mean?"

"There was a listener while we were talkin' in the pantry."

"Who?" and now fear caused the captain to be very wide awake.

"The boy. He can hear even a whisper from the pantry while lying in his berth. I tried the experiment a little while ago, an' know that not a word could have escaped him."

"And he heard what I said?"

"That's the size of it. He came to ask me not to leave him behind when the brig was scuttled, an' you can fancy what a turn it gave me. He didn't seem to think it anything out of the way to tell the whole story, an' I've taken the precaution of lockin' him in his room."

"That was right. He must fall overboard before daylight, or we shall stand a good chance of going to jail if we ever show up on shore again."

"Now don't talk foolishness," Stout replied impatiently. "In the first place, I won't have murder committed; it's bad enough to scuttle a vessel. Then, again, it couldn't be done without some of the crew knowing about it, and even if they simply had suspicions the loss of the brig immediately after the boy was silenced would show up the whole matter."

"But what shall we do?"

"That's what I don't know. All I can say is as to what mustn't be done an' leave you to figger out the rest."

The captain was silent for fully a minute, and then said abruptly:

"I wish you'd bring the bottle in here; I need something to clear my head a bit."

Mr. Stout obeyed at once, and when he returned the master of the brig had seen a way out of what promised to be a very serious difficulty.

"We'll soon settle him, and I'll answer for it that the crew will be glad enough to help us."

"What is the scheme?"

"Keep him a close prisoner from now out. Say that we have discovered he has some contagious disease——"

"But anybody with half an eye can see he's well and hearty."

"There are plenty of things which can be hatched up. Say leprosy; that will startle every man jack, I'll go bail."

"Then what? We can't leave him on board when the brig goes down."

"How thick-headed you are to-night, Stout! Take a drink to brighten you up. Suppose the men believe he's a leper? The result will be that they'll insist on our setting him ashore, as we should do in case he was really afflicted with the disease. We can land him on some small key, and the matter will be settled."

"But he'll talk all the same when he gets back."

"If he ever does."

"Then it is really murder you are thinking of!"

"Not a bit of it! We'll simply maroon him, with plenty of grub, and trust to chance for the rest. We'll make Spider Key for the first land, and once he is there I'll guarantee he stays."

"But I don't fancy the idea of such a thing as that," Mr. Stout replied thoughtfully. "It is different, this scuttlin' a vessel for the purpose of doin' the insurance companies, while to maroon a boy is very much the same as puttin' a knife into him, and perhaps more cruel."

"Look here, Stout, it is too late for you to be squeamish. He has heard the plan and knows you agreed to it. Once his story has been told on shore, even if we back out now and put the brig into port, the cargo can be examined, and it's good-by for you and I. Death wouldn't be half so bad in my eyes as ten or fifteen years in jail, and that'll be the size of it if he's allowed to run around with our secret."

"I s'pose you're right," the mate replied with a sigh; "but it's mighty tough for the poor little fellow, all the same."

"Not so much so as it would be for us. I'll see to it that he has enough in the way of grub and weapons to keep him going for a year, and at the end of that time it won't do much harm if he should tell the yarn."

One would have said from the expression on the captain's face that he felt certain Ned would not be alive at the end of a year; but the mate was willing to soothe his conscience with the thought that he might find some means of escaping from the key, and thus the matter was settled.

It only remained to decide upon the room which should answer for Ned's prison until he could be sent ashore, and Mr. Stout said:

"I reckon we may as well leave him where he is, eh?"

"By no manner of means. Didn't you say he could hear all that was said in the pantry?"

"Yes; but what of that? We needn't go there to talk any more."

"You're still thick-headed, Stout. If he can hear so plainly, what's to prevent him from chinning with some of the crew or the steward? It's a chance we mustn't take, for if we give out that he's a leper and he manages to tell one of them that he was never away from the State of Maine in his life, there would likely be a very big question as to the truth of our statement."

"Then the only vacant room is the one next to mine."

"Exactly. We'll put him there and leave the crew to say what shall be done with him. I'm 'way off my reckoning if they don't insist on his going ashore the first chance. When that has been done we'll make a big show of burning the bedding, and the thing is over."

"Very well, sir, I shall have to give in that you can handle this matter better than I. Now, if you'll take care of the balance of the job it'll be a big weight off my mind. I couldn't face that boy, knowin' what we're goin' to do, without standin' a chance of givin' the whole snap away."

"Leave it to me; I'll attend to everything, and

you shan't see him again till the day we take him on shore."

Mr. Stout went to his own room after this promise; but it is safe to say that his sleep was neither sweet nor refreshing.

Two hours later Ned was awakened by a heavy hand laid on his shoulder, and as he raised his head the captain's voice was heard.

"I want you to shift rooms, lad. The carpenter is going to make some changes here, and you'll lose the best part of the night's rest if you try to stay."

The words were spoken in the most friendly of tones, and Ned, wondering not a little why it was the master of the Evening Star had suddenly grown so kind, hastily dressed himself.

Captain Bragg stood in the doorway until he was ready, and then led him to the room adjoining the chief mate's, saying as he opened the door:

"It ain't a bad swap for you to make, my son. We keep this for passengers because it is so big, and don't usually count on givin' it up to one of the crew; but it seems necessary in this case. You needn't try to turn out early in the mornin'; I shan't have a regular meal served till the repairs are made, so lay in bed as long as you please."

Then the captain closed the door, locking it so gently that the turning of the key could not be

heard, and Ned undressed himself again in a perfect maze of bewilderment.

The captain's excessive kindness caused wonderment not unmixed with fear, for he remembered what Mr. Stout had said the day previous when the gentleman was so affable.

"There's no need for me to fuss about it," he said after trying in vain to fancy some good reason for this almost affectionate manner. "Of course he don't want me to do anything for him, else he'd asked with his fist. Perhaps he's been drinkin' too much, an' I'd better turn out the same time as usual."

This last supposition seemed the most reasonable, and, believing he had hit upon the true cause for the change of demeanor, he devoted his entire attention to sleep.

At what time Ned awakened next morning he was unable to say; but it seemed quite late when he opened his eyes, and jumping quickly from the berth, began to dress hurriedly as he muttered to himself:

"I reckon I shall have to walk mighty straight this morning, for the captain will be crosser than a bear."

After making a hurried toilet he attempted to go into the saloon, and, to his great surprise, found the door was locked.

It did not seem possible at first that such could be the case ; but after trying in vain for several moments to open it, he was forced to admit he was a prisoner.

" Some one has turned the key, not knowing I was in here," he thought, and then began to pound on the door in order to attract attention.

It was not necessary to do this many seconds before succeeding in his purpose, and he heard the captain's voice from the outside :

" If you don't keep quiet I'll break every bone in your body !" came in low, but angry tones.

" But the door has got locked somehow."

" I did that myself. You'll stay where you are till I make up my mind what shall be done with you."

" But why am I kept here ?"

" You'll find out soon enough. Behave yourself, and there'll be no harm done ; but if I hear so much as a single yip, you'll know what the cat tastes like."

Then all was silent once more, and Ned literally staggered back to the bunk, trying in vain to understand the meaning of this very strange performance.

He could think of nothing he had done or neglected to do which would warrant such treat-

ment, and after studying over the perplexing matter until his head swam, he lay down again.

An hour later the door of his room was opened, and the captain entered, bringing a supply of food.

"Here's enough to eat and drink till morning," he said gruffly as he placed the tray on a locker. "Take hold and enjoy yourself as much as you can, for this terrible thing isn't any fault of yours."

"What do you mean?" Ned cried. "What have I done?"

"Nothing, lad; but the men are not willing to have you around."

"The men!" Ned repeated in bewilderment. "What can they have against me?"

"They're afraid of catching the disease, and I can't say I blame them."

"But I ain't sick."

"Do you mean to tell me you didn't know you had the leprosy?" and the captain now appeared to be thoroughly surprised.

"Have I?" and Ned in turn evinced astonishment.

"There's no question about it. If I had noticed you more carefully the day you came on board, I should have known what the trouble was. Now it will be necessary to stay here quietly until we can set you ashore where there's a hospital, for you need immediate care."

Ned was so bewildered that he did not question the man further; but threw himself on the bunk once more, entirely at a loss to understand anything in regard to the matter, save that the crew had suddenly grown afraid of him.

"You must keep very quiet," the captain continued. "Don't exert yourself by moving around, and I will see you have everything that's needed until we put you on shore, which will be by to-morrow, or the next day at the latest."

Then the master of the Evening Star left the room, locking the door behind him, and Ned tried in vain to realize his position.

After a time he remembered that he had not asked the captain what leprosy was, and examined his face in the glass to see such evidences of sickness as would warrant people in being afraid of him.

His skin seemed of a healthy color, and he asked himself if he felt ill in any way; but without receiving a satisfactory answer.

"I can't make out that I'm different from what I always was; but there must be something wrong, or the captain wouldn't act so awful good."

Since he was not sensible of being an invalid, and had a very clear idea he felt hungry, there appeared to be no good reason why he should not partake of the plentiful supply of food which had been brought.

He made a hearty meal, and then lay down again as he muttered to himself:

"All I can say is that it ain't very bad to be sick with leprosy, for I feel first class, an' oughter be willin' to stay here a long while if they feed me up in this shape."

During the day he slept considerable, but during the night was more wakeful. Now and then it was possible to hear the hum of voices from the cabin; but he could not distinguish the words, and, from the "heel" of the vessel, knew she was reeling off the knots in fine shape.

When another day dawned and the rays of the sun, coming through the port-hole, lighted up the tiny apartment, he expected to see the captain with a second supply of food; but the hours passed on, and his door remained locked.

Then came the thought that perhaps they were making preparations to scuttle the vessel, and he would be left behind to drown.

The chance of this seemed so great that he had made up his mind to pound on the door in order to attract attention, despite the threats of the captain, when that gentleman entered.

"Well, my lad," he began in a cheery tone, "I am glad for you that it won't be necessary to stay here many minutes longer."

"Have you found out that there is nothing the matter with me?" Ned cried eagerly.

"I wish I had; but there's no such good luck as that. We are off Spider Key now; the brig will soon be hove-to, and you are to go ashore. I'm sorry we couldn't fetch up on the other side of the island where the village is, but, under the circumstances, you won't mind walking a couple of miles. We shall give you enough so there'll be no chance of wanting anything, even though you should stay here a year, and when it comes right down to facts, you'll be better off than if you remained on board."

"Will I have any trouble in findin' the village?"

"Not a bit. Walk straight across till you come to it."

Ned was satisfied. He had had so many hard rubs in his life that this being set ashore did not surprise him, and the fact that he would have enough to keep him for a year seemed like a wonderful show of generosity on the captain's part.

Just then the tramp of feet overhead, mingled with cries of command, told that the brig was coming up into the wind.

Captain Bragg went to the companion-way a moand then returned with Mr. Stout.

"Are you going ashore with me?" Ned asked in glad surprise.

"Yes: the men backed out from the job, an' since somebody must do it, I allowed you'd rather it would be me."

"Indeed I had," Ned replied, and if he entertained any suspicions previously, they were dispelled now the one man on board whom he considered a friend was to accompany him as far as the shore.

The captain enveloped the boy in a rubber coat which partially hid his face, saying as he did so:

"You should be careful about taking cold. There's a damp wind comes off the water, and it's best to keep your face well covered until you are in the hospital."

Ned, now firmly convinced that the master of the Evening Star was his very good friend, obeyed orders to the letter, and Mr. Stout led him on deck.

The brig was hove-to off a low-lying, sandy island about half a mile away, and a more desolate-looking place could not well be imagined.

Far down on the opposite shore was something dark which might be a clump of trees, otherwise there was not so much as a blade of grass in the way of vegetation.

The boat was alongside, and, standing well forward, as if afraid of having the leper pass them, were the crew, looking very much disturbed.

"You can see how frightened they are of you,"

Mr. Stout said in a low tone. "It was all the captain an' I could do to prevent them from setting you adrift in one of the boats."

"How funny it is that they should have got scared when I look the same's I ever did."

"But you don't, my lad. There's a big change in your appearance since you come aboard."

"I feel jest the same, anyway."

"Yes, folks with that disease always do; but come on, we must get to the island as quick as we can, or the brig may go on without me."

"I wish you was goin' to stay ashore too."

Ned was clambering over the rail as he said this, consequently did not see an expression of what was very like fear which passed over the mate's face, and it seemed impossible for him to make any reply.

On stepping into the boat Ned noticed a number of packages in sail-cloth, and asked what they were.

"Provisions an' sich like as you may need while stoppin' here. The captain tells me he has given you a first-class outfit, large enough to keep you like a prince for a year."

While speaking Mr. Stout had begun to row toward the shore, and when they were so far from the brig that his words could could not be overheard by the captain, who was watching them from the quar-

ter-deck, he said as he motioned with his foot toward a small bundle which lay under the stern-sheets:

"I found a lot of fish-lines, a pocket knife, an' a quantity of matches in my room this mornin,' so I put 'em aboard thinkin' they might come in handy for you."

"What would I want with such things if I'm goin' to the hospital?" Ned asked in surprise.

"Is that where you're bound for?" the mate inquired, and now it was his turn to show astonishment.

"Of course. Didn't the captain tell you?"

"I ain't certain as he did. I've been pretty busy on deck since you was taken sick, an' haven't had much chance to talk with him."

"But I haven't been taken sick. Captain Bragg says I've got leprosy; but that's all."

Mr. Stout acted very much as if he did not care to prolong the conversation.

He rowed as rapidly as possible with his head half-turned, as if to avoid looking the boy in the face, and pretended not to hear when Ned asked relative to the location of the village.

When the bow of the boat grated on the sand he leaped ashore and began pulling out the packages with feverish haste, while Ned, throwing off the rubber coat because of the heat, leisurely stepped on the land.

NED WATCHES THE MATE ROW BACK TO THE SHIP.—Page 49.

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In a very few seconds Mr. Stout was ready to return to the brig, and stopped as if to shake hands with Ned; but evidently changed his mind, for instead of so doing he leaped in the craft.

"Perhaps I'll see you when we come back," he cried, and then pulled at the oars with all his strength, keeping his eyes fixed on the bottom of the boat to shut out from view the boy who stood at the very edge of the water, gazing after the man whom he believed to be his friend.

CHAPTER IV.

MAROONED.

NED remained exactly as Mr. Stout had left him until the little craft was alongside the brig, hoisted on board, and the Evening Star, swinging around into the wind, was standing off on her course once more.

During all this time the mate had not, so far as he could tell, looked at him for a single instant, and this apparent lack of sympathy puzzled Ned.

"I don't see what makes him so queer," he said to himself as he watched the vessel rapidly drawing away from the tiny island upon which he had been landed. "The captain seemed kind enough while I was locked in the state-room; but neither he nor the mate acted as if they felt bad because I had to go away."

Then once more he wondered what leprosy was, which necessitated his leaving the brig so suddenly, and to neither of these mental questions could he give a satisfactory reply.

The packages which had been brought ashore were

too numerous to admit of his carrying them at one load, and he decided to leave everything, except the articles given him by the mate, on the beach until he could locate the village.

The fishing-lines, knife, and matches he put in his pockets, covered the other goods with the rubber coat, and when the Evening Star had faded away in the distance to a mere smudge on the horizon, he set out in search of the inhabitants of the island.

It was about noon when he came ashore, and since then fully two hours had been spent watching the brig.

The heat seemed intense, and the glare of the sun on the white sands nearly blinded him.

"There's no use standing here any longer," he said aloud after one more glance at the faint shadow which marked the brig's position. "If I don't start it'll soon be dark, an' then there *would* be trouble, for a fellow can't find his way around a strange island very well when it's impossible to see anything. It seems kinder queer that I was so sick it wasn't safe for me to stay aboard the Evening Star, an' yet the captain thought it was all right for me to walk a couple of miles when it's hot enough to melt the boots off a fellow's feet!"

Then, with his eyes fixed on what appeared to

be a clump of trees, in order that he might be certain of traveling in a direct course, Ned set out, trudging along resolutely, regardless of the heat, which brought the perspiration from his face in tiny streams.

The hard lessons of life which Ned had already received stood him in good stead now. Without them he might have weakened before this, the first of many troubles yet to come; but he had known a number of instances where a good deal more labor than that of walking two miles had been required of him, with no prospect of a reward when the task was finished, and the question of fatigue hardly entered his thoughts.

He believed he should soon arrive at a village where he would be hospitably received as soon as he informed the inhabitants that he had been set ashore because of suffering from leprosy, therefore the thought of what he would soon enjoy served to pass the time more rapidly.

After half an hour's steady walking he saw that the point toward which he had been making his way was indeed a clump of trees.

The grove was situated at the head of a small bay which made in on the western side of the island, and here the vegetation was almost luxuriant.

Trees covered an extent of land fully half a mile square, and sloping down from the higher portions of the island to the water's edge were bushes and small plants in profusion.

To a fellow who wanted to "camp out" where he would be free from intrusion, it was a beautiful place; but to one in Ned's situation, who hoped to see houses as a sort of guarantee that he might find something to eat, it was not cheering.

"I reckon the village is on the other side of the grove," he said to himself. "If I'd known where to look for it in the first place I might have saved quite a long walk."

He was beginning to grow tired, and the heat had caused such a thirst that water seemed an absolute necessity.

Fortunately he was not forced to travel very much further without a plentiful supply of this most precious liquid.

After passing about half-way through the grove, he came upon a small natural spring which apparently gushed out of the coral rock, and here he made a long halt, satisfying his thirst gradually because of the intense pleasure of drinking when his tongue was so parched.

The thing which struck him as most strange was the fact that during all his travels he had not seen a sign of human beings.

From what he had noticed of the island while on the brig, it did not appear to be very large, and he failed to understand how it could be populated and this portion so completely deserted.

"I mustn't sit here thinkin' about it," he muttered, rising to his feet. "It'll be night before I strike the hospital if I don't keep moving."

Straight through the grove he went, then on the other side within sight of the water, but seeing no signs of life, save when the birds swooped down past him as if trying to find out what sort of creature this was who had come among them so suddenly.

He quickened his pace, and continued on with grim determination until the sun sank behind the waste of waters, and the shadows of night were gathering more rapidly than he had ever seen them before.

"I have surely walked three miles an hour," he said to himself, "and if it was two o'clock when I started, I've got over not less than twelve miles. Say it was three across from where I landed to the grove, and that makes nine I've footed it around the shore with——"

He ceased speaking very suddenly, and stood silent and motionless staring in front of him on the sand near the water's edge.

He had returned to the very place where Mr. Stout put him ashore, for here were the packages just as he had left them.

During at least five minutes he remained like a statue gazing at the inanimate objects as if expecting they would give him some solution to what was a perplexing riddle, and then like a flash of light the truth came into his mind.

"What a fool I have been not to understand the whole thing before!" he exclaimed. "When I told what I had heard from the pantry, the mate went to the captain, and the two decided that it wouldn't be safe to let me go among the men, for fear I might give away the secret. The idea of my bein' sick was cooked up, I was kept in the state-room so none of the crew could see me, an' landed on the first desolate island the brig came to. There's no show of people livin' here, for I've followed the water around, and nearly all the time could see half-way across, so that part of the business is settled. Now I'm to stay here till I die so's I can't tell about their wreckin' the brig."

There was only one thing that prevented Ned from giving way to the despair and grief which came into his heart with the knowledge of the cruel deed of which he was the victim, and that was the certainty the Evening Star would soon be scuttled.

"Perhaps I'm lucky in only bein' set ashore here. They might have kept me on board till the last minute, an' then left me to go down with the vessel."

Boy though he was, Ned understood that it was in the highest degree necessary he should retain control of himself, and instead of indulging in useless grief, he set about making the best of what was a very bad plight without a single redeeming feature.

"There's no use in goin' hungry, an' I may as well see what we've got here in the way of grub," he said to himself as he unfastened the largest package.

A cry of anger and disappointment burst from his lips as the contents were disclosed to view.

The square of canvas contained nothing but oakum and bits of rope.

Feverishly he opened the others, only to find them filled with rubbish of all kinds.

The captain had doomed him to starvation, and the different bundles were prepared to deceive the crew, some of whom might have been suspicious had the poor boy been set ashore with nothing to eat.

Captain Bragg believed death would soon close the lips of the one who had unwittingly learned his secret.

Ned no longer tried to act the manly part.

Anger was the first sensation after the terrible discovery that he had been sentenced to a lingering death, and he attacked the rubbish in a frenzy, throwing it on every side and stamping upon the fragments like a madman.

Then came grief and despair.

Seated on the sand by the side of what he had believed was a generous supply of provisions, he gave way to tears, and when this fit passed it was night.

He was too tired to retrace his steps to the grove, the only place where could be found the semblance of a shelter, even had he been disposed to battle against the fate which seemed to beset him on every side.

Stretching out at full length on the sand, he pulled the rubber coat over him, and finally fell asleep with a partially defined hope that death might overtake him before he could awake to consciousness.

For a boy who had just been marooned and who neither had provisions nor the means of procuring any, Ned Rogers slept remarkably well.

Although the sand was by no means as soft as the hard mattress in the state-room of the Evening Star, he did not awaken until the rays of the sun falling across his face banished the slumber from his eyelids.

For an instant he gazed around in wonderment, not knowing how such a change could have been made in his surroundings, and then the full knowledge of all that had occurred came to him once more.

His first impulse was to cry, and then he checked himself resolutely as he said:

"Look here, Ned, it won't do at all. I don't remember that you've ever been in quite as hard a scrape as this; but I'm certain you know what it is to be hungry, and this island ain't half as tough as runnin' 'round Jonesboro hearin' the folks say you are bound to come to some wicked end. You're pretty near as bad off as Robinson Crusoe, an' yet he come around all right."

Then Ned regretted not having read the book more carefully when Frank Hubbard loaned it to him, because if he had done so he might the better have been able to decide upon his future course.

Rising to his feet and mechanically plunging his hands in his pockets, he became aware of the fish-lines, and with this very pleasant remembrance came the thought that Mr. Stout had given him these few articles with the kindly hope that he might prolong his life.

"Perhaps he didn't dare to do any more while the captain was watching. Anyway, I oughter be

able to catch some fish if I can find bait, and with what matches I have got there won't be much trouble about building a fire."

The mere fact that he knew what to do seemed to give him no slight amount of mental relief, and he started at a rapid pace for the tiny bay which ran up into the grove.

"There will be fish in that place if anywhere, and after breakfast I reckon it won't be such a very hard job to rig up some kind of a shanty," he said to himself as he walked along, keeping a sharp look-out meanwhile over the surrounding waters in the hope of seeing a sail.

There was not a craft of any kind in sight, and if he had known exactly the position of Spider Key, he would have understood that his chances of seeing a vessel were very slight.

On arriving at the shore of the bay his first work was to dig in the sand for worms, as he would have done at Jonesboro; but on reaching the foundation coral without finding other form of life than fleas, he gave it up as a bad job.

Then he walked around the beach until he found what looked like mussels, and breaking the shell of one of these soon had his hook baited.

The shores of the bay were very bold, and it was hardly necessary to use a pole in order to cast the line into deep water.

To the anxious fisherman it seemed as if the hook had hardly reached the surface before the bait was seized by a silvery fish, and a second later he had the first portion of his breakfast on shore.

"With three fellers like that I'll have all I can eat this morning," he said in a tone of satisfaction.

It surely seemed as if the fish of the bay were eager to accept his invitation to breakfast, and before one could have counted fifty he had a plentiful supply.

The task of cooking them was more difficult than the catching, because of his inexperience.

Instead of burying them among the ashes as he should have done, Ned could think of no other way than to toast the fish, by placing them on short sticks stuck in the sand near the blaze.

This was a tedious and unsatisfactory way of cooking, because while one portion was burning the opposite side of the fish was growing cold; but he succeeded after a certain fashion, and his hunger was appeased.

There was no especial reason why he should work very industriously, or, at least, he did not think there was, and he seated himself within the shade of the trees, remaining there until he fell asleep once more.

When he awakened again it was afternoon and time to think of getting supper.

"This won't do," he said ruefully. "I mustn't go on simply eatin' and sleepin', otherwise when it storms I shall be badly left. I wonder if the queer clams I used for bait wouldn't go well roasted? It won't take so long to cook them, and perhaps I can yet make a good start on buildin' a shanty."

To kindle the fire and throw among the coals an armful of mussels was not a long job, and then Ned walked slowly through the grove to decide upon the location of his proposed house.

He finally, after considerable discussion with himself, concluded that it would be wisest to erect the building within a short distance of the spring, and near the head of the bay.

In order that he might have no difficulty in finding the spot selected, he half broke, half cut down a sapling, and then went back to the scene of his culinary operations.

The mussels were well roasted; but, lacking salt, they were not as palatable as the fish.

"These go a long way ahead of nothin'," Ned said grimly, "but fall mightily short of some grub I've tasted in my day. After the shanty is built I shan't have anything to do but hunt 'round for provisions, an' it'll be queer if I can't manage to catch one or two of these birds."

He was rapidly getting rid of that terrible feeling

of utter desolation which had at first come upon him, and appeared as well able as any boy could have been to provide against want.

The remainder of the day was spent in house-building, and a slow task it proved to be. He had no other tool than the pocket knife, and it was not particularly well adapted to the hewing of trees.

He contrived to lop off some of the small limbs and break down saplings enough to make the roof of his shanty; but before anything more could be done night had come.

Again he slept under the rubber coat, and despite the fact of the noon-day nap his slumber was long and profound.

He was awake by sunrise, however, and fully determined to have something to show for this day's labor.

In order to economize time he made a breakfast of roasted mussels, and then began to work with a will on the building.

Before the sun set again he had put up a dwelling which pleased him very much, save as to size.

It was not more than six feet square and about five high, but it would serve to shelter him from the rain, although a heavy wind might level it in short order.

To four small trees which grew at nearly equal

distance from each other he had lashed the main timbers of the building, using creeping vines for ropes, and placing them at as high a point as it would be convenient to work.

Across these were tied other poles about four inches apart, and over them were laid the broad leaves of what appeared to be a species of banana plant, the whole being bound down with vines.

The sides and one end of the shanty were inclosed in leaves, and while the wind was not too boisterous he had a very comfortable dwelling.

On this night Ned slept for the first time in his life beneath his own roof, and there was such a sense of satisfaction and proprietorship in the fact that he almost forgot his desolate condition.

Next morning he was in no hurry to arise. Having worked so hard on the previous day, it seemed only fair he should indulge in a prolonged resting spell.

Hunger forced him to venture forth before the forenoon was very far advanced, however, and for the second time he served up a meal of fish, which were captured as readily as before.

After this two or three hours were spent trying to snare some of the birds by making a slip-noose with one of the fishing-lines and placing within the circle fragments of mussels.

He had no difficulty in enticing the feathered visitors to an examination of his bait, but they refused in the most provoking manner to alight long enough for him to fasten the string around their legs, and he was forced to relinquish this method of replenishing his larder.

"You've beaten me this time," he said with a laugh; "but just wait awhile till I rig up another kind of a trap, and we'll see who comes out best."

The next most pleasing method of passing the hours seemed to be by an examination of what he had already begun to call "his farm," and he set out intending to make a full exploration in two days, going half-way around on each excursion.

"If I only had a dog I believe this would be a jolly sort of a place in which to live for a month or so," he said aloud, as if there was a certain sense of companionship in the sound of his own voice. "It's goin' to be mighty lonesome after awhile."

He had started on his exploring trip by following the same course taken when he was searching for the supposed village; but on this occasion he walked nearer the water's edge and kept a sharp lookout for anything which might serve as food.

A few yards from the edge of the grove he found a portion of the coral not covered by the sand, and

on this was a fine white powder which he tasted of eagerly.

"It's real salt!" he exclaimed in surprise and delight. "I reckon the sea-water has washed up on it, an' then the sun has dried the salt out. That's the way I've heard Deacon Grout say some folks found it."

As may be supposed, he was careful to gather up the small amount which had been prepared by the elements, and while doing so resolved to make arrangements for getting as much as might be needed in the future.

A leaf served as a salt-dish, and he carried it carefully back to the hut, saying as he deposited the precious powder where it could not be blown away:

"To-morrow I'll go after those pieces of canvas the captain wrapped his bogus grub in and begin this part of my housekeeping in ship-shape fashion. The fish will taste mighty good to-night if I can manage to cook them all over alike."

When this had been done to his satisfaction he started once more on the exploring tour, and after having walked fifteen or twenty minutes was rewarded by another "find" which seemed even more valuable than the first.

This was neither more nor less than what ap-

peared to be the hull of a small vessel almost entirely buried in the sand, the ends of the framework only showing above the surface.

"Now I can build me a house that won't be in danger of goin' to sea when the first storm comes on," he said triumphantly. "The only thing is to rig up something which will answer as a spade, and the rest is just a question of hard work."

CHAPTER V.

A DISCOVERY.

Although Ned had never been shipwrecked, nor, except in the case of the story about Robinson Crusoe, had he ever read of such disasters, yet he understood that before he gathered a supply of food, in case such a thing should be possible, it was necessary to have a substantial building in which to keep it.

It was his intention to lay in a quantity of salt; but in case he was forced to store it in the shanty of leaves the stock would be destroyed by the first storm of rain, and in fact it seemed as if all his hopes of being able to hold out until some craft should come within hail depended upon his having a building sufficiently strong to resist the weather.

Therefore it was that he hailed the discovery of the wreck as of the highest importance, and resolved to work at her incessantly, save when it was necessary to prepare food or sleep, until he had accomplished his purpose.

In view of the fact that the only tool he possessed

was a pocket-knife, the task was gigantic; but it was as if the difficulties in his path only served to increase his courage.

He had said that all he needed was something which would serve as a spade; but even with such a modest want in his mind he was brought to a standstill.

To hew down a tree sufficiently large to provide him with material for a wooden shovel an ax would be absolutely indispensable, and it was quite positive there was no lumber to be found on the shores, for he had already made nearly an entire circuit of the key.

His joy at the discovery was lessened considerably by the difficulty in the way of utilizing it, and he studied over the problem a long while without having arrived at a conclusion which was satisfactory.

"It's certain I can't have a spade or anything like one," he said thoughtfully; "so the question is, what else can I find to throw the sand away with? I reckon those timbers are buried pretty deep, and a fellow couldn't do very much with only his hands."

In order to ascertain exactly what might be accomplished with nothing in the way of imple ments he began to kick and shove away the sand;

but in a short time his fingers were made sore by the sharp particles, and he realized that in less than an hour of such work his hands would be blistered and cut.

Then he walked slowly back to the grove and looked around as if for an inspiration.

This was neither more nor less than a waste of time, for the saplings were the only objects which could be cut down with the knife, and these he attacked at once.

"A fellow can't make very much of a fist diggin' sand with a stake," he said as he worked; "but so long as I couldn't use my hands more than half an hour, these poles will go, way, ahead of nothin'."

After cutting down half a dozen small trees, the trunks of which were no larger than his wrist, he whittled the thickest ends flat and proceeded to the work.

It was very much like trying to dig with a spoon; but yet he made a certain amount of progress, and when inclined to grow down-hearted because so much labor was necessary in order to accomplish very little, he repeated to himself again and again that when a fellow has more time on his hands than he knows what to do with, it can matter very little how long it takes him to perform a certain piece of work.

When the night came he had uncovered a couple of timbers down to where the planking of the vessel still held comparatively sound, and found that he was at the stern of the craft.

"She run head on to the key," he said as he stopped to rest before returning to his hut. "The crew must have been asleep to strike here, for the island shows plain enough."

If Ned had been more experienced in such matters he would have understood that the vessel unquestionably came ashore many years before, when the coral island was much smaller, and the work of the minute creatures which have formed the fringe of keys or reefs around the Florida coast had gradually built under her, until now she was twenty or thirty feet from the water's edge.

Even to Ned's inexperienced eyes the marks of great age could be seen; therefore he had no hope of finding anything amid the timbers which could serve him in the slightest degree, except in the way of materials for a hut.

"I don't fancy there'll be much of any trouble in knockin' the timbers apart," he said as he went slowly toward the place he was beginning to call "home." "By to-morrow night I ought to have a couple of pieces loose, an' I'll set them up outside my shanty. I can build around it, an' when the wooden house

is done it will only be necessary to pull the camp of leaves out."

A supper of fish seasoned with salt gave him a most appetizing meal, and when he lay down to sleep his eyes were soon closed in blissful unconsciousness because of the weariness of body.

On the following morning but little time was spent in the preparation for breakfast, and he began once more the task of unearthing the wreck.

Having simply been pushing the sand up, quite a high bank was formed, and it became necessary to level this before the work could be continued.

By noon he found a prize in the shape of a short piece of plank, perfectly dry despite the length of time it had been covered by the sand, and an hour's labor with his knife served to convert it into a rude shovel, with which he could do twice as much as when the stakes were his only tools.

The outside of several timbers were laid bare, and then, preparatory to wrenching them from their fastenings, he shoveled from the inside near the fragments of the stern-post.

About half an hour before sunset the wooden scoop struck against a hard substance which he knew could not be the "skin" of the vessel, since it was much too high up from the keel.

Merely from curiosity, and not with any idea

that he might be making a valuable discovery, Ned labored only to ascertain what was concealed beneath the sand, and before the night had fully come, he was gazing in surprise at a small box covered with rawhide and bound with iron.

It was about ten inches long and eight high, so tiny that he anticipated no difficulty in raising it, but, to his astonishment, found it required the exercise of all his strength to pull it from the bed of sand in which it had lain so long.

"I'd like to know what's inside," he said as he stood looking at the small but exceedingly heavy package. "There's no hope of breaking it with one of the poles, for the rawhide would hold it together, even if I should splinter the wood. I reckon it wouldn't be a bad idea to burn one end off."

This last thought seemed to be a happy one, and the boy set about carrying the "find" to the hut.

It required all his strength, and more than once was it necessary for him to rest, but he finally succeeded, the last portion of the journey having been made after nightfall, and once at the place where the camp-fire was usually built, he forgot about supper.

He was curious to see the contents of the odd box, and this desire was greater than his hunger.

Building a glowing fire, he placed the case in such

a manner that only one end would be affected by the flames, and as the rawhide began to crackle and shrivel it suddenly occurred to him that the package might be filled with cartridges.

"If it is I reckon this is no place for me," he said in something like alarm, moving off a short distance, and then recovered his composure as he added:

"The danger can't be great, no matter how much powder may be there, for the box must have been under water a long time, an' I don't allow fire could do it any harm."

Now he approached sufficiently near to heap the coals up as the wood began to smolder; but despite the amount of fuel expended, it was fully an hour before his purpose was accomplished.

One end of the case was now so charred that he anticipated little difficulty in forcing it open with a stake from the roof of his hut, and the package was drawn back to a comfortable distance from the flames.

A heavy blow with the largest piece of wood he could find, a dull, metallic sound, and Ned stood transfixed with surprise.

From out the half-burned box poured a veritable stream of silver coins, more money than Ned had ever seen before in all his life.

During several moments he remained silent and

motionless, gazing at the wonderful find as if fearing it might suddenly disappear should he take his eyes from it, and then he needed no further proof that it was real—not a phantom conjured up by a weak or disordered brain.

There could be no question as to the fact that the pieces were silver, and mostly of the denomination of dollars from the Mexican mint. Although Ned had never had the pleasure of handling many such coins, he knew there was no deception about the contents of the box, and during a certain length of time he was literally beside himself with astonishment and joy.

He had forgotten how he chanced to be on that lonely key, and heeded not the fact that it might be years before he would find an opportunity of reaching the mainland, or the chances of being unable to carry his treasure with him when, if ever, he did go.

The only thing clear to his mind was that he, the pauper of whom it had been predicted that "some bad end surely awaited him," was virtually rich.

Without making any attempt to count the coins, he believed there was sufficient to satisfy his every want no matter how long he might live, and this crowded aside all other thoughts.

Two hours later he, like every other person who

has unexpectedly come into possession of a fortune without being forced to toil for it, suddenly bethought himself that he had been content with a single box.

If one had been hidden there so long, why might there not be many more in the same place?

A few moments previous he had been perfectly content with what he had and his own forlorn position. Now his greatest desire was to find more; but yet he could not leave unguarded the precious metal.

It is true that there was no one on the island to rob him; but yet it did not seem safe to go away even for a single instant while it was thus exposed to view, and at once he set about making a hiding-place, first heaping high the fire with branches which he tore from the trees with a fictitious strength born of his excitement.

Then—and this time he regarded not the fact that the sand would cut his fingers—he scooped away the loose soil with his hands until the foundation of coral was brought to view.

On this, placing the coins in even piles, he stacked up the treasure until it covered a space of six or seven square inches, after which it was carefully covered with sand once more.

Then came the thought that the box might be-

tray him in case any one should come suddenly, and he flung it on the fire, watching jealously until every portion had been consumed.

The hiding-place of his wealth was trampled upon until even the most scrutinizing search would have failed to reveal the fact that the surface had been disturbed to any great depth, and then he started once more toward the location of the wreck, hardly giving heed to the fact that the key was shrouded in darkness.

He was made sensible of this before trying to walk very far, however, for after having taken twenty steps he ran into a small tree, striking his nose such a blow that the blood flowed freely.

This had the effect of restoring to him at least a portion of his scattered senses, and he made his way back to the fire, stanching the flow of blood with the sleeve of his coat.

"It seems a good deal as if I'd been makin' a big fool of myself," he said with a nervous laugh, "an' I don't know that it's to be wondered at. When a feller who never owned a whole dollar in his life has 'em come tumblin' in on him the way them did, he's likely to get rattled. I needn't be in such a hurry to get at the rest, in case there's more to be found, for, 'cordin' to the looks of things, I shall have plenty of chance to dig the old craft over two

or three times before anybody happens this way to help me off. Most likely Captain Bragg took good care to land me where vessels never come, for it would go hard with him if I should get back to tell my story when he was anywhere around. The best thing is to get some sleep now, an' in the mornin' I'll have a hunt for more dollars. I wonder what they'd say on board the brig if it was known I'd fallen into such a snap?"

Ned looked once more at the place where he buried his treasure to be certain he left no traces which might show what had been done, and then lay down beneath his shelter of leaves; but sleep did not come at his bidding as quickly as on the previous night.

Then he had not a penny or the means of getting one, so far as he knew, and yet his rest was unbroken and refreshing. Now that he was comparatively wealthy slumber refused to visit his eyelids, and the sensation of perfect repose was denied him.

As he lay there thinking over the good fortune which had come to him so unexpectedly, a pattering on the leaves above caused him to start up in alarm.

Then he laughed heartily, for the noise was occasioned by the falling of rain.

"Here I am playin' the fool again," he said

grimly. "If it hadn't been for that money I should never have thought of bein' frightened just because of such a little noise. But say, if it storms very hard I shall be likely to have a rough night of it in spite of all my silver!"

The rain descended more rapidly, the wind moaned among the trees, and the sullen roar of the surf came from the beach.

"The sand I shoveled out this afternoon will all be blown or washed back," he muttered, "an' I shall have to do the work over again; but I reckon it won't be so hard now I know what it's possible to find."

The storm came up rapidly.

In less than ten minutes from the time the first drops of water fell, it seemed to Ned as if a perfect hurricane was raging.

The fire was extinguished with many an angry hiss and splutter, and shortly after the illy secured roof of the shanty was blown away like a dry leaf, while the sides and end soon went to keep the other company.

It was useless attempting to avoid the down-pour. In less than three minutes from the time his shelter was borne off on the wings of the storm, Ned was as wet as if he had been indulging in a bath without undressing, and the only thing he could hope to

do was to prevent his precious matches from getting wet.

The salt had taken French leave with the first puff of wind, and to save his only materials for kindling a fire, Ned deprived himself of his coat, wrapping the garment around the small supply of "fire sticks."

The bundle he carried under his arm, or, rather, held it there while he clung to a tree to prevent himself from being blown bodily into the sea.

In this manner he passed the remainder of the night, and it seemed as if the morning would never come.

He did not dare to leave the spot to which he had first fled for safety, although many times it seemed as if the tree would be uprooted, for the darkness was so intense that he could not have seen his own hands if held within a few inches of his eyes.

But in the midst of all this discomfort, and even danger, he thought of the treasure continually, wondering if he would have much trouble in finding the place where the silver was buried after the rain had obliterated his landmarks.

The morning broke gray and forbidding.

The huge waves rolled up on the beach as if intent on submerging the tiny key, and breaking on

the shore with a force that caused the island to tremble under the blows.

There was no promise in the sky that the storm would soon subside, and Ned gazed in dismay at the ruin which had been wrought.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ZOE.

ALTHOUGH Ned had not progressed very far in the way of building a habitation, it seemed to him as if the gale had swept away what little he could call his own.

Not only was the hut demolished, but he had great difficulty in deciding where it had been located. The last vestige of the fire was effaced, and with it was gone all accurate means of ascertaining the exact place where the silver was buried; but this did not trouble him particularly, because he knew it would not require any very lengthy search to find it again.

In the grove more than half the trees had been leveled to the ground, and one glance was sufficient to show that he would have quite a task before him in order to make his way through the tangle of boughs and foliage.

All this he took in at one hasty glance, not troubling himself with regard to the details, for just at that moment his chief concern was as to what he should do for food and shelter during the day.

"I reckon it's a case of holdin' on here a while longer," he said to himself, "for if I once let go my hold it might be hard work to get back again, and, besides, it's easier to keep the matches dry as I'm standin' now. There don't seem to be much of a show for gettin' anything to eat yet awhile. Even if it was possible to build a fire I wouldn't be able to catch any fish or find the clams. If I hadn't made such a fool of myself over the silver I'd got supper last night, an' shouldn't be so hungry now."

Regrets were useless, however, as he soon realized, and all he could do was to cling to his tree and hope the strength of the wind might abate as the day grew older.

In this last respect his wish was granted.

By ten o'clock the force of the gale had sensibly abated, although even then the wind was blowing harder than Ned ever experienced it before.

It was now possible to leave the shelter of his tree without incurring imminent danger, and he worked his way further among the fallen timber in the hope of finding some place where the matches could be left, for even the strain of holding them so tightly was beginning to tell upon him.

There were plenty of opportunities to deposit his precious package, but not with any certainty that it would be kept dry, for there was water every-

where, until it seemed certain the key must be submerged.

He finally decided to leave the bundle under the trunks of two small trees which had been uprooted, and then crept out to where a full view of the sea might be had.

An exclamation of fear and dismay burst from his lips as he stood where he could gaze out over the angry waters, for in full view, and not more than a mile away, was a small craft, tossed to and fro like an egg-shell, but being driven rapidly toward the key.

It was some time before Ned could discern her rig, and then he discovered that she was a steamer, but a tiny one. Probably some pleasure yacht which had been driven to sea by the fury of the gale and was now unmanageable.

She was almost on her beam-ends, and each time the gigantic waves lifted her on high Ned fancied he could see two forms lashed to the port rail, which was to windward.

Every few seconds she would be carried down, down into the trough of the sea until it seemed as if the storm king was bent on sending her to the bottom, and when she rose again it was with that uncertain, sluggish movement which tells of the weight of water within the hold.

"If she strikes here those poor men are doomed," Ned cried, much as if fancying some one could hear his words, "and there's nothing I can do to help them! A fellow would be swept off his feet the instant he so much as touched the surf line!"

That the yacht would strike the shore there could be no question.

If it was possible to guide her into the little bay there might be some chance for those on board to save their lives, for there the surf was not quite so violent; but the apparently doomed ones could not alter the course by so much as a hair's-breadth.

The beautiful craft was but a plaything for the waves, and as helpless as a wounded bird.

Ned gazed at the terrible scene as if fascinated.

For the first time since the discovery of the treasure did he forget that such a metal as silver had an existence. All his thoughts were centered on this evidence of the storm's fury, which must apparently soon be blotted from view, and with it would go the lives of two human beings.

Almost unconscious of what he did, Ned walked down toward the water line, until he was as far as it was safe to venture, and once there, fancied he saw one of the figures wave its hands as if imploring him to render some assistance.

"I wish I could do it!" he shouted, as if thinking

THE WRECK OF THE STEAM YACHT ZOE.—Page 85.

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the sufferers could hear him. "I haven't got a boat, an' even if I had, she couldn't be launched in this surf!"

He took no heed of time.

He only knew that the yacht was coming broadside on very rapidily; but whether five minutes or five hours had elapsed from the moment he first saw her, it would have been impossible to say.

When she was not more than a hundred yards from the shore the waves swung her around until he could see in gilt letters on her stern the name Zoe.

Then she went down once more into the chasm of waters, and on rising again it was apparent that the end had come.

Up, up, up until it seemed she was directly above his head did the wounded craft rise, and then, as if impelled by some terrible force from seaward, she shot landward, coming so near where Ned stood that he involuntarily leaped aside, fearing the hull might crush him.

There was no very heavy crash as she struck, or if there was Ned failed to hear it.

It seemed to him as if the waves had left her gently on the sand and then ran back to gather fresh impetus before pounding her to pieces.

During such a time as one might have counted

ten she was literally high and dry, and in that short interval Ned had sufficient presence of mind to shout:

"Jump! Jump now while you've got the chance, an' I'll catch you!"

One of the two obeyed, throwing himself, rather than leaping, from the deck, which was almost perpendicular, and Ned rushed forward, seizing him by the coat just as the waves returned with an angry howl and roar.

Instantly on touching the sand the sufferer staggered forward and fell on his face, where he lay like one dead; but Ned managed to drag him beyond the reach of the surf and turned his attention to the other.

"When the water goes back you must jump!" he shrieked, and this command was emphasized by the violent rolling of the little craft as the sea nearly turned her over. "One more wave like that an' it will be too late!"

The words were understood, and two minutes afterward Ned was dragging the second body high up on the beach; but whether or no he had succeeded in saving life it was impossible to say.

Both the rescued ones lay on the sand as if dead, and Ned gazed at them helplessly, not knowing what should be done.

To his surprise, for until this moment he had not had any time to note details, he saw that both were boys about his own age, and even at this dreadful moment, when it was a question whether they were yet alive, he wondered how it was that two young fellows should be alone on a yacht like the one which promised speedily to become food for the waves.

While he stood looking at them helplessly, the one who had first reached the shore opened his eyes, stared around in alarm, and then attempted to rise to his feet.

He was too nearly exhausted to permit of such an exertion, and would have fallen backward had Ned not seized him by the coat collar again.

"Better lay still awhile," he said soothingly, "an' you'll soon get your strength. There isn't such a thing on the island as a house, or I'd try to get you under cover. As it is you'll have to stay out of doors till something can be rigged up for a shelter."

"I'm all right; but where is Roy? Didn't he get ashore?"

"If you mean the fellow who was with you, you've only got to turn around in order to see him. He don't show up very lively yet awhile, but I guess he'll come 'round all right after a time."

As a means of bringing the yet unconscious boy

to his senses, Ned shook him violently and persistently until the sufferer opened his eyes in a languid sort of way.

"Are we safe, Vance?" he asked feebly.

"Indeed we are, even if it did look so blue a few minutes ago. The yacht was thrown directly up on the bank, almost above high-water mark, and all we had to do was to drop off."

The knowledge that he was safe when death had seemed positive served to revive the boy wonderfully, and before five minutes had passed both the shipwrecked ones were staring at Ned as if asking how it was he happened to be there.

"I s'pose you want to know if I live here?" he said cheerily, for the fact that he had companions was a wonderful relief in his loneliness; but even as he spoke there came the thought that the arrival of these two might put an end to his treasure-seeking unless he should be willing to share with them.

"How did you get here?" the boy who had been called Vance asked.

"I was set ashore from the brig Evening Star so's Captain Bragg could wreck her; but it's too long a story to tell now. Wait till things are a little more comfortable, an' then I'll give you the whole yarn. Where did you come from?"

"Key West."

"Were you running the steamer alone?"

"We had three men with us," Vance replied with a shudder, "but all of them were washed overboard during the night. I'd rather not talk about it just now. How do you feel, Roy?"

"As if somebody had been beating me until every bone in my body is broken. What's your name?" he added, turning to Ned.

"Edward Rogers."

"My name is Roy Harland, and this is my cousin, Vance Stewart. Have you been here long?"

"Since the day before yesterday."

"Isn't there any place where we can get in out of the storm? It seems as if I should feel better if I could get dry once more."

"I built a shanty of leaves and poles, but the wind moved it for me last night in fine style. It took about ten seconds to get rid of the whole establishment."

By this time the boys thought of the yacht, to which no attention had been paid since Vance first recovered consciousness.

She was laying on her beam ends with the waves pounding against the timbers with a force that threatened to convert the hull into kindlings, but Ned fancied the waters had receded somewhat since he first ventured down to the shore.

"I suppose she is bound to go to pieces," Roy said mournfully as he gazed at the little craft.

"I'm not so certain about that," Ned replied. "It strikes me the sea isn't runnin' quite as high as it was an hour ago, and if you'll notice, the water doesn't come up as far as it did."

As he spoke he pointed to the line of foam and drift which had been left on the sand some time previous, and all three watched it several moments.

"It's certain the waves are not reaching that mark," Vance said with a sigh. "Perhaps the little craft won't go to pieces after all."

"It ain't likely you'll ever see her afloat again."

"That may be; but if she holds together we shall have a good supply of provisions, and I don't fancy you've got more than you need."

"My stock is yet to be caught. All I've had so far is fish, with a few clams that weren't very good, an' I couldn't get breakfast this mornin' because of the storm."

"The Zoe is well fitted out, and in addition to plenty of provisions, we shall be able to get from her canvas enough with which to make a tent."

"If that's the case we'd better keep a mighty sharp lookout, so if she does go to pieces we can save some of the stuff," Ned replied eagerly, for the idea of having a shelter which would be water-tight was

particularly pleasing to the boy who had had a short but rather unpleasant experience in a less substantial dwelling.

Vance suggested that they go into the grove, where the party would be partially sheltered from the wind, but Ned refused to leave the beach. He insisted that it was in the highest degree important to be on hand in case the yacht went to pieces, and the others would not venture alone.

Inch by inch the water receded until the wreck was in such a position that it would be possible to board her by wading a short distance, and Ned proposed that the work of salvage be begun at once.

"I can send down a lot of stuff by going aboard an' riggin' a block on the flag-staff," he said, but the others thought it best to wait until the storm had cleared away.

By noon the rain ceased falling, and Ned built a fire after some difficulty, owing to the dampness of everything, including the matches, and then, as Roy and Vance began to feel the pangs of hunger, they agreed that it was time to get some of the stores ashore.

Ned clambered aboard, the boys directing his movements, and if Vance had not interfered, he would have landed each article as it came to hand.

"There is no sense in doing that until we have something in the way of a tent to keep the stuff dry. There's little danger of another storm right away, and we may as well do the thing properly."

"Well, what do you want first?"

"Get enough out of the pantry for dinner, and after we've had something to eat we'll set at work on the tent. There are a lot of old sails in the fore-peak, and we shall have canvas in plenty."

Ned selected about three times as much provisions as the little party could eat at a single meal, for the yacht had everything on board to tempt one's appetite, and the castaways made a hearty dinner of the choicest canned goods.

Ned sent ashore cooking utensils in abundance, and Roy, who proved to be no mean cook, served up the different dishes in a manner far excelling anything in the culinary line Ned had ever seen.

"Now, this is what I call comfort," the marooned boy said when he had rather more than satisfied his hunger, and the sun came out from behind the clouds, thus giving them an opportunity of drying their clothing. "It wouldn't be a bad idea to get a little sleep; I didn't close my eyes once last night, except when the sand was flying so thick that it was necessary."

"Neither did we," Roy replied, "and I'd like a

nap this minute, but I don't think we can afford the time just now. We ought to get at least one tent up before dark."

Ned was by no means a lazy fellow, and thinking it incumbent to do the largest share of the work since his new acquaintances were supplying all the provisions and comforts of life, he leaped to his feet at once.

Vance went aboard the wreck with him, and in less than an hour they had on shore the sails, tools with which to do the necessary labor, and an additional supply of food.

Bedding sufficient for the party was the last on the list, and after this had been procured the boys began the work of hut-building.

His previous experience had taught Ned how essential it was to secure everything in such a manner that it could not be blown away, and the tent which was to be used as a sleeping apartment was erected in a workmanlike fashion.

Two trees growing at the desired distance apart, near the spot where the silver was buried, served as the uprights for the ends of the camp, and to these a ridge-pole was lashed firmly.

Across it was spread the largest sail, and the edges pegged down until one would have said a hurricane could hardly make any impression upon it.

The ends might be closed with blankets, or sail cloth if necessary, but owing to the warm climate it was not thought advisable to shut themselves out from a plentiful supply of fresh air until a storm should render it imperative.

It was nearly nightfall when this work had been completed to the satisfaction of all hands, and then Vance went on the wreck once more for lanterns.

"We may as well make things look as cheerful as possible," he said, "and it's a good deal more pleasant to have a light after the fire goes out than be in the darkness."

"If you say the word I'll get the stove from the cook's quarters," Ned suggested. "It isn't very large, an' I could almost handle it alone."

"I think we'd better leave that until morning. It will take quite a while before we got it going, because coal must be brought ashore, and Roy can get us up one more meal on your fire."

Ned was satisfied with any arrangement they might wish to make, but he insisted on having a couple of pails for fresh water to prevent the necessity of running to and fro from the spring so often, and these Vance brought with the lanterns.

The amateur cook prepared as tempting a supper as he had the dinner, and when all had done it full justice the dishes were placed outside the tent to be

washed in the morning, for night had now fully come.

Ned piled the fire high with wood, for since he had an ax the labor of preparing fuel did not seem very great to a boy like him, who had always been forced to perform such laborious tasks, and then he lay down on one of the yacht's mattresses, feeling that he had every reason to be thankful for the change in his surroundings.

"Now tell us how you happen to be here," Roy said. "We've got plenty of time, for we don't want to go to sleep immediately after supper, and when you have finished Vance and I will explain how it is the yacht came ashore with only us two as a crew."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DISASTER.

Ned not only told the story of his being marooned, but gave a detailed account of his life from his first recollections to the present day, and when this rather long narrative was ended, Roy began according to agreement.

"Vance's father and mine live at Tampa, in Florida, during the winter, but they haven't come down yet. We were allowed to start ahead of the two families because just at this time it is a question to be decided whether we attend school any longer or call our education finished and go into some kind of business.

"The Zoe hails from Key West, but she has been chartered by Vance's father for the season, and we had permission to cruise in her as far as Savannah, with her regular crew, of course, at which port we were to meet our parents and carry them around to Tampa.

"We had on board day before yesterday a sailing master, an engineer and his assistant. Vance and

I acted as stewards. I don't know where we were when the storm came up, but had heard the master say he should run close up the chain of keys. Of course you know the hurricane began in the night, and since Vance and I were both below, we had no idea of the nearest land.

"I was awakened by the pitching and tossing of the yacht, and as it made me feel rather sick I thought it would be wisest to remain where I was instead of venturing on deck, where there was little chance of seeing anything.

"It was nearly daylight when Vance realized that something unusual was going on, and then he felt so nearly the same as I that it was a case of both remaining where we were until I thought I heard a scream from the deck. Twice it appeared as if some one was calling me by name from a distance, although Vance declared I must be mistaken, and then I managed to get on deck to investigate.

"Even then it seemed as if the little craft was under water more than half the time, and while I stood in the companion-way wondering whether it was safe to attempt to go forward, a wave broke over the stern and literally drowned Vance out of his berth. He yelled for me not to make a fool of myself by keeping the door open at risk of swamping the steamer, but to come back, and just at that instant

I saw the engineer in the pilot-house waving his hand for me to join him.

"From the expression of his face, and the fact that he was at the wheel instead of where he belonged, I knew there was something wrong; but since it would have been worse than useless to have gone across the deck just then, and I'm inclined to believe the best sailor in the world couldn't have done it, I ran below, through the passage into the engine-room, and from there to the pilot-house.

"You can fancy how startled I was at seeing no one attending to the machinery. Both Vance and I had been taking lessons in running the craft, and the engineer continually impressed on our mind the necessity of always keeping a strict watch on the engine. After learning that this portion of the yacht was 'going it alone,' I got to the wheel as soon as possible, and there found no one but the engineer.

"Without waiting for me to ask any questions he said that the master and his own assistant had been washed overboard and drowned half an hour ago. It seems the engineer had sent the young fellow to the wheel-house to carry some coffee which had been prepared on the boiler during the night, and the poor man slipped just as he opened the door leading from the deck to the wheel. A big wave

carried him over the side, but he clung to the rail, and the sailing master ran out to help him.

"Just at that moment another wave swept the yacht fore and aft, carrying both the unfortunate men with it, and the engineer saw the whole thing without being able to aid them in the slightest. The steamer, with no one at the helm, began to yaw, and would have been swamped then and there if he hadn't run to the helm. From that moment until I appeared at the companion-way he had been shouting for us. The engine and the fires needed attention, but he couldn't go below until some one relieved him from the steering.

"I knew a little about such things, and since we were running on a course which it had been the sailing master's intention to hold until noon, there was nothing to do but keep her by the compass. The engineer went below, and after what seemed like a very long time, Vance, worried because I had not come back, went into the engine-room. Ten minutes later he was with me, looking about as pale as any fellow you ever saw."

"I couldn't have been much whiter than you was," Vance retorted.

"I'm willing to admit that," Roy replied, "for I was as frightened as I well could be, and the thought that two out of our crew of three were

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dead didn't tend to make the situation seem any more cheerful."

"Could you have run the yacht to Savannah if she hadn't got wrecked?" Ned asked.

"We might, but only by pure chance, and then it would have been necessary to heave to at night. The engineer confessed that he couldn't do it, so you can see that even then matters appeared to be about as bad as possible, though we soon had good proof they were not. For two hours more we staggered along as best we could, and it seemed to me that the yacht was completely under water half the time. Then the engineer came to tell us that Vance must come into the engine-room with him. Something had gone wrong and he needed assistance.

"Vance went, and when they arrived there the engineer discovered that several of his tools were in the forepeak. He started after them. I saw him come on deck and tried to make him go back. At that moment the engine stopped suddenly; the yacht seemed to be filled with steam, and when it was possible to see anything more the engineer had disappeared, probably washed overboard as the others had been.

"Of course it was useless to stand at the wheel while there was no steerage-way on, and Vance and

I had begun to discuss whether it would be possible for us to hoist one of the sails in order to keep her before the wind, when the final disaster came.

"I can't describe how it happened, but in an instant she was on her beam-ends, and every movable thing, including both the boats, was washed away. I didn't feel so very bad when the tenders went, because they would have been of no service to us in that sea, even if we could have gotten them free from the davits, which I doubt.

"From that hour until you saw us we could do no more than cling to the rail waiting for the last moment to come, and many times did it seem certain the wreck was going to the bottom. I gave up all hope when the engineer was washed overboard, and never saw a ray of promise again, even when you shouted for us to jump."

"Well," Ned said reflectively after a brief pause, "now we're here, what's the chance of ever gettin' away? The yacht might be floated, but the question is whether you could run her."

"I don't know but that the machinery is injured so badly we couldn't even turn the screw. Don't you suppose some kind of a craft will come along this way pretty soon?"

"I'm afraid not," Ned replied. "You see, Captain Bragg most likely set me ashore in a place

where there wasn't much chance anything like that would happen, otherwise I might have told my story before he had an opportunity to collect the insurance."

"That's true," Vance replied sleepily. "I'll venture to say, though, that we shall come out all right in a few days, even if it is necessary to take to a raft. So let's go to sleep now. I feel as if I hadn't closed my eyes for a week."

Roy was quite willing to act upon this suggestion, and in a very short time the two were sleeping soundly; but Ned could not compose himself for slumber so readily.

The question of the treasure troubled him considerably.

If he should reveal the secret the boys would most likely claim their share, and although he now had very much more than he had ever expected to own, it was hard to part with a single piece.

In case he did not tell them, how could he take it away?

If any craft came along and they had an opportunity of leaving the key, he could not carry the treasure with him unknown to his companions, and would also be debarred from searching for more.

"I shall have to let them into the snap," he said, with a sigh. "It's too bad, but I don't see how it

can be helped. In the morning I'll show what I found, an' we'll begin work on the wreck."

With this resolve his mind was freed from the greater portion of the trouble which had weighed heavily upon it, and he fell asleep.

When the boys awakened on the following morning the scene which met their gaze was really a cheerful one, save for the disabled steamer lying half-submerged on the shore.

She alone told of disaster.

The waves were shimmering like gold in the rays of the sun; the foliage was of the densest green, with the white tent at the edge of the grove like a jewel on a piece of rare enameling, and as a background the yellow sands, which sparkled like silver.

Ned stood at the door of the tent drinking it all in until Vance, awakening, cried:

"What is the matter? Do you see a craft?"

"There's nothin' in sight. I was lookin' around and thinkin' that, accordin' to the way things appear this mornin', it isn't such a terrible thing to be either marooned or shipwrecked."

"Not after a fellow has gotten safely ashore; but as for going through the experience, I've had enough in mine. I don't believe I shall ever again feel perfectly safe on the water, no matter how big a craft I'm in."

The hum of conversation awakened Roy, and he heard the last remark.

"Nonsense!" he cried with a hearty laugh. "If we get off this island safely, it won't be a week before you'll be trying your luck in the first boat that comes at hand."

"Wait and see."

"That's what I shall have to do. I reckon I'm booked for the most of the cooking, as I did on the Zoe, and I happen to fancy some fried fish. If you two fellows will get the stove on shore, I'll try my luck with one of Ned's lines."

Ned was eager to see what Roy could do in the culinary department when he had every convenience. He had proved himself such a success as a cook on the evening previous with nearly everything lacking that the breakfast should be a marvel, and he started on without waiting to hear what Vance had to say on the subject.

Lying on her beam-ends as the little steamer was, the task of getting the stove ashore was not a difficult one.

The kitchen was on the port side, and she had been flung upon the starboard rail, consequently they would not be impeded by the water. It was only necessary to pull the small range up, and then let it slide down the almost perpendicular deck.

Roy had not brought his labors as a fisherman to a close when the stove was in position near one end of the tent, and Ned began making a swinging-cap to the pipe in order that it might not be necessary to move the entire apparatus whenever the wind shifted.

Vance brought another supply of provisions on shore, and marked out a site for the cook-tent, saying as he did so:

"The sooner we get a second camp up, the sooner we can begin to bring the stuff ashore from the steamer. I figure that we've got enough canvas to make another tent as big as the first, and it will give us ample room for all our supplies."

"And we can't get them on shore any too soon, according to my way of thinking," Roy added as he finished cleaning the fish. "No one knows when another storm may spring up, and I don't believe the poor old Zoe would stand a second such beating as she got yesterday. It may be we haven't many days left in which to strip her."

"We'll begin as soon as breakfast is over. It won't take more than two hours to put up the other tent, and by nightfall there should be enough here to last us a good many months, if we don't get too extravagant and serve bacon with our fish," he added laughingly as he saw what Roy was preparing to do.

"If you knew very much about cooking you wouldn't grumble at anything like this. All first-class cooks, including myself, serve bacon with fish."

"Not when they are cast away with no chance of replenishing their stores."

"I can't say as to that until after making inquiries, but I'll let you know at the first convenient opportunity. Breakfast is ready, if the boarders will please arrange themselves on the ground in proper attitudes.

"I'll start the thing," Ned said as he seated himself near the stove, "an' after we've eaten our full I'll show you fellows something that'll make your eyes stick out more'n they ever did before."

"Something connected with the island?" Vance asked.

"Yes."

"Then tell us now, or I shall spoil my breakfast trying to guess what it is."

"It would spoil your breakfast for a certainty if I should even hint at it, and this grub is too good to be wasted."

Neither Roy nor Vance fancied for a moment that their companion could have any very important secret, but they bantered him to reveal it until the last fish and slice of bacon had disappeared, when he said with an air of seriousness which surprised them:

"Put the dishes away while I go aboard the steamer for a shovel, an' when I come back you'll get the biggest kind of a surprise."

The boys understood from the tone in which Ned had spoken that he was not trying to make sport of them, and both watched him earnestly as he returned with the necessary tools for unearthing his treasure.

"Now keep your eyes peeled," he said as he began the work, "an' tell me what you see."

Exclamations of surprise burst from the lips of the boys when the piles of silver were exposed to view, and Ned turned the pieces over much like a miser counting his hoard.

"Is this all yours?" Vance cried as soon as he had recovered from his surprise sufficiently to be able to speak.

"I reckon it is, seein's how I'm the first one to find it."

"Find it?" the boys cried in concert.

"That's what I said. It was in a box, but I didn't have anything to open the cover with, so had to burn it off, an' after that there was nothin' left in which to put the money."

"How many dollars' worth are there?"

"I haven't had time to count them. I didn't find the beauties until the night of the storm."

"And was it on this island you discovered them?"

"Of course. You don't fancy Captain Bragg would send that much ashore with me, do you?"

"Where did it come from?" Roy cried, pale with excitement.

"I'll show you, an' it seems as if we ought to be able to get more, for I didn't hunt very much."

Ned led the way through the grove, his companions urging him to greater speed, so eager were they to see the exact spot from which the treasure had been taken.

"There it is," he finally said as he pointed to the blackened timbers which could be seen above the sand.

"A pirate vessel!" Vance exclaimed.

"I don't think so," Ned replied decidedly, although his ideas as to what a piratical craft might be like were very hazy. "It don't seem as if they'd keep money boxed up the same as that was which I found. I was after the timbers to build a hut of, an' dug the sand away with sticks, so you can fancy I didn't have a chance to search over very much space."

The storm had obliterated all signs of his labor, but he remembered exactly which of the ancient timbers he had counted on first taking away, and

was thus able to point out the exact spot where the treasure had reposed so long.

"Let's overhaul the whole place, and see what we can find," Vance cried excitedly, and would have started at full speed after a shovel but for Roy, who caught him by the arm as he said impressively:

"Wait a minute. There is plenty of time, and we'd better talk this matter over. No one can say how long we may be obliged to stay here, and perhaps the hour will come when food seems more valuable than gold. If there is other treasure in this place it will stay, and that is what can't be said for the yacht."

"You think we'd better get the grub ashore before foolin' 'round here?" Ned asked.

"Yes, most decidedly. When we have taken from the yacht all which may be useful, we shall still have plenty of time to dig over this sand. Or, even if it happens that we are rescued very soon, our fathers will be willing to come here after hearing Ned's story."

"Very well, let's get to work at once, for I'm eager to see how many more of those dollars can be found," Vance said with a laugh. "I don't suppose they'll do us any good while we're prisoned here, but it must be mighty pleasant work digging them out."

CHAPTER VIII.

WRECKING.

As nearly as could be ascertained after the boys were on board the wreck once more, she had not sustained any very serious damage so far as the hull was concerned.

Ned lowered himself down over the port side by means of a rope, and reported that the timbers appeared to be intact.

"I can't see that a single plank has been started, an' it wouldn't be such a terrible job to get her afloat once more."

"I guess we won't try anything of that kind yet awhile," Roy replied with a laugh. "It's positive that some accident happened to the machinery, and neither Vance nor I could repair it."

"I thought you said you had been learnin' how to run her."

"So we did; but we weren't so far advanced in the study as to be able to repair a broken engine."

"Perhaps there isn't so very much the trouble. I've seen boilers in Treat's sawmill blow out a tube

or two, an' it didn't require any skill to repair that kind of damage."

"There must have been something more serious than that happen, otherwise she wouldn't have stopped so suddenly," Vance replied. "At all events, we needn't talk yet awhile of trying to float her. We'll get the movable property ashore, and tackle your old hulk before doing anything more in the way of wrecking."

The boys had not anticipated having such a task as was really before them, until after working at it an hour.

Very many of the fittings they were most eager to save belonged, or had fallen, on the starboard side, and in order to reach these it was necessary to dive, for the hull was filled with water to about half its breadth.

When noon came they were glad of a breathing-spell.

The tent had not yet been put up, and that labor was to be performed immediately after dinner.

They had on the shore a large collection of goods, however, and Ned said as he surveyed the pile:

"It won't take us much more than a week to finish the job in great shape."

"Have we got to wait all that time before finding the dollars?" Vance grumbled.

"It isn't certain we shall ever see any more, so there's no use in worryin' about what may not exist."

"That's where you're right, Ned," Roy cried. "It may be Vance will have a chance of learning that there are other things in this world more valuable than money, although I hope he won't get the lesson in quite so rough a manner as is possible."

"It isn't so much the money as it is the pleasure of finding it that I'm after," Vance replied laughingly. "To hear you fellows talk any one would think I had suddenly turned miser."

"Then don't be so impatient to dig," Roy replied, and just then it was necessary for him to cease his part in the conversation because the soup he was making needed his immediate attention.

Despite the fact that he appeared so eager to hunt for treasure, Vance was not willing to cut the "nooning" short by so much as a single minute, for the unusual exertion had tired him thoroughly, and he insisted that the party should rest not less than two hours.

"If, as you say, we are likely to be here a long while, there isn't any very great need of hurrying, and I feel as if I'd been shoveling coal for a week."

The others were quite as willing as he to delay the labor during the heat of the day, and the result

was that the task of wrecking was not resumed until nearly three o'clock, when the greater portion of the remaining time was spent in putting up the tent.

It was necessary this work be done in a thorough manner, lest the next gale should level it to the ground, and each fastening was looked to carefully.

When the task was finished the young wreckers had good reason to feel proud of their arrangements for "housekeeping."

The cook-tent was placed at right angles with the other, so that one end of the sleeping apartment would be partially screened from the wind, and both were lashed together in such a manner as to add to the solidity of each.

"It will be a case of losing both or holding all," Roy said in a tone of satisfaction as he surveyed the result of their labors. "Now when such provisions as have not been spoiled by the salt water are under cover, I shall feel as if we were in fair condition for a long stay here."

"Don't you suppose your fathers will search for you when the yacht fails to show up at Savannah?" Ned asked.

"Of course; but the chances they will ever find this little island seem to me mighty slim," Roy replied. "It won't pay to discuss the matter just

now, though, for all that stuff on the shore should be under cover by sunset. Come on; we shall have to work mighty hard to finish before dark."

And the young wreckers soon learned that Roy was correct.

The sun had been behind the sea fully an hour before the last package was sheltered from the weather and the labor of getting supper could be begun.

It had been unnecessary to light the lanterns in order to finish the job. There was not a cloud in the sky, and the stars gave sufficient light to enable them to see their way to and fro from the beach to the tent.

Both Ned and Vance assisted the cook in preparing the evening meal, and what a delicious sense of comfort was theirs when, supper having been eaten, all three lay on the soft beds where they could look out over the ocean!

"For shipwrecked mariners I think we're fixed mighty well," Vance said dreamily. "We've got as good a shelter as could be asked for in this climate, plenty of water, provisions enough to last several months with economy, a supply of fish whenever we feel disposed for such food, and a bank on which to draw for what gold and silver we need to pay with."

"Don't count too much on that, for your checks might not be honored," Roy replied with a laugh. "Say, are we going to leave Ned's treasure out of doors all the time?"

"Certainly not. It must be hidden in the store-tent to-morrow.

"Why do you call it mine?" Ned asked. "I'm livin' on the stuff brought by you fellows, an' it's only right we should divide the dollars as well."

"I don't think that would be fair," Roy replied. "If we find any more it'll be the square thing to whack up even, but the pile near the fire belongs to you entirely."

"That's so," Vance added, and although Ned insisted he should divide it, his companious stated positively that they would not take a single dollar.

This decision afforded Ned no slight amount of satisfaction, for, even though he would not have envied them the possession of a full two-thirds, he felt very much relieved in mind when they refused to allow him to share the treasure with them.

But little time was spent over the matter, however. All hands were so sleepy that even in the midst of quite a heated argument one after another fell asleep untill the camp was in a state of complete repose.

The sea, which had been so cruel to two of them

a few hours previous, now sang the softest lullaby, and the stars twinkled above them as if their faces had never been hidden by the angry storm clouds which sent the wind and rain to overwhelm travelers upon the ocean.

CHAPTER IX.

GHASTLY VISITORS.

On the next morning work was resumed upon the wreck, and, following Ned's suggestion, the party made a proper division of time, during which certain tasks were to be performed.

Seven o'clock was the hour set for Vance and Ned to begin whatever task might be the most important; but Roy would not join them for an hour later, in consideration of the fact that he, as cook, had been at work fully sixty minutes before the others.

In order that dinner might be ready at a regular time, Roy was to cease all outside labor an hour before noon, and remain in camp an hour later than his friends in order to set the "house" to rights generally. At night he would return from wherever the others might be toiling an hour sooner than either of his companions, and both were to assist in washing the dishes used at supper.

By this division of labor it was certain there

could be no complaint that one was doing more than another, and regularity of movements would be insured.

The work of wrecking was continued in a more workmanlike fashion, thanks also to Ned.

He rigged a tackle to one of the short masts, and by such means the goods could be hoisted out of the hold with a great deal less exertion than was necessary in pushing and pulling by hand.

This contrivance was particularly useful when they wished to send ashore a portion of the coal to be used in the range, and, thanks to it, very much more could be accomplished in a given time with less labor than by the former haphazard fashion of working.

Roy's proposition was to dismantle the yacht entirely, saving everything possible, even to the machinery, and Ned raised no objections, for all this would be necessary in order to carry into execution a plan he had already formed.

It was his intention to float the little craft if possible.

While engaged in wrecking he examined thoroughly every portion of the hull, and became convinced that she was as sound as ever, unless, by chance, some of the starboard timbers, which it was impossible to see because of her being heeled over on that side, had been stove.

Without saying anything regarding this matter to his companions, he was mentally calculating how the task might best be performed with the limited appliances at their disposal, and this problem occupied his mind even to the exclusion of the supposed treasure.

It must not be fancied, however, that because Ned put from him all thought of the wealth which might yet be gained from the hulk, the subject was dropped entirely.

Vance talked of little save what they would do when the work of treasure-hunting was begun, and Roy was quite willing to join in such conversation.

When the second day of wrecking had come to an end and while the cook was yet busy over the range with a certain mysterious compound which Vance declared would be either a stew or a roast as it chanced to turn in the process of cooking, Ned proposed that his store of silver be taken better care of than by allowing it to remain under the sand, where there might be some trouble in finding it quickly should such a necessity happen to arise.

Vance was all the more willing to assist in the work because he had a most intense desire to learn how many dollars there were in the pile, and the two set about the task, having first converted three pillow-cases into bags.

Counting the money proved to be a long job.

When Roy insisted that his companions postpone the work until after supper lest the "compound" should by spoiled by getting cold, they had set out only seventeen piles, in each of which was $100, and the main portion of the coins seemed nearly as large as ever.

"There is more than twice that amount in the lot," Vance said as with a sigh of regret he ceased his very pleasing occupation of handling the money long enough to eat, "and it was a lucky day for you when the captain of the Evening Star decided to scuttle her."

"It seems so," Ned said just a trifle doubtfully; "but both the money and I are here on a key which doesn't appear to be in the track of sailing vessels, and it is a very serious question whether the silver will do us much good."

"We're bound to get away some time," Vance replied in a positive tone. "We must be somewhere off the coast of Florida, and I don't believe we can stay such a very long while without being discovered."

"What do you call a long while?" Ned asked.

"Two or three months."

"Suppose a year should roll around, and we were still in this place?"

"Before then I should advocate trusting ourselves to a raft."

"Built out of what?"

"There is plenty of stuff. We could cut down trees enough to make a famous craft, with what might be taken from the yacht."

"But you forget that she is likely to go to pieces in the next gale."

"Stop discussing the future possibilities," Roy cried impatiently. "There will be time for that after all the work has been done, and just now I want you to find out whether I've got a roast or a stew. It isn't such a great while ago since Vance was worrying terribly about it, and now the stuff is getting cold."

Ned was perfectly willing to sample Roy's cookery, but he did not intend that the subject which he had brought up should be dropped without a thorough discussion.

He was most eager to interest his companions in the task of saving the little steamer, and mentally resolved to broach the matter again at the first convenient opportunity.

There was no mistaking the savory dish Roy set before them for anything but stew, even though it had been made of canned meat, and the tired boys ate until even the counting of silver seemed very much like a hardship.

A short siesta seemed absolutely necessary after such a hearty meal, and not until an hour had passed was the work of stowing away the treasure resumed.

Then all three assisted in the counting, and when the task had been completed they knew Ned's find amounted to exactly twenty eight hundred Mexican dollars.

"The pile looked as if it was much larger," Vance said in a tone of disappointment as the last piece was placed in one of the pillow-case bags.

"Considering the fact that it was got without very much labor, I don't think there is any reason to kick," Roy replied with a laugh. "To hear you one would fancy you thought you were an injured individual because the money wasn't counted, placed in bags bearing your monogram, and tagged in proper shape."

"No, that's where you're wrong," Vance said gravely. "I'm willing to do the counting and stowing away, but I don't like to make such a mistake. I figured that there couldn't be less than $6,000 in the lot."

"Well, now that you have been undeceived, what do you propose to do about it?"

"Turn in as soon as we hide this stuff somewhere."

The question of where the money should be concealed was not easily settled.

Ned proposed that it be stored with the goods in the cook-tent, but neither Vance nor Roy would agree to anything of the kind.

Although there was not a living being on the island except themselves, it did not seem safe to leave so much wealth lying around loose, and Vance actually appeared afraid some portion of it might be spirited away.

He suggested that the bags be placed under the mattresses, and this plan was tried, but only to be rejected, for although it is pleasant to have a great many dollars, it is not comfortable to lie on them, and the possession of the treasure promised to deprive the boys of no little amount of sleep.

It was nearly ten o'clock when the matter was finally settled by depositing the silver in a tool chest which had been brought ashore from the yacht, and then the castaways were able to gain the necessary rest.

Two more days were spent in wrecking, and by the end of that time everything worth saving, except the machinery, had been brought ashore.

The store-tent was well filled, and it was so difficult to find any particular article which might be needed that Roy insisted one day should be devoted

to repacking the goods in such a manner that they could find what might chance to be needed without being forced to overhaul the entire stock.

Thus another day went by without their searching for more treasure or making any progress toward regaining the mainland.

During all this time a strict watch had been kept, as a matter of course, in the hope of sighting a sail, but nothing larger than a sea-gull's wing had come within their range of vision.

They were beginning to realize that it might be weeks, perhaps months, before they would succeed in leaving the key.

It was on the morning after the store-tent had been put in proper shape that Roy, who in his capacity of cook was forced to rise earlier than the others, electrified his companions by shouting as he went outside the camp to build the fire:

"Here's a boat heading this way, fellows!"

It can readily be fancied how quickly the boys leaped to their feet at the summons, and running with all speed to where Roy was standing, they saw the object to which he referred.

There certainly was *something* on the sea a long distance from the key, but whether it was actually a boat or not neither was able to say with any degree of certainty.

"I believe I can see her bow as she rises on the swell!" Roy cried after they had stood gazing in silence several moments upon the floating object.

"That can't be, unless she is empty, for if so much could be distinguished, we should see the oars as they were raised or lowered."

"Perhaps those on board are asleep."

"That isn't very possible, if they are shipwrecked sailors, as seems likely."

"Why couldn't they be pleasure seekers?" Vance asked.

"Because it isn't probable they'd fool around here in such a craft as that appears to be. There isn't so much as a mast to be seen, and if anybody was coming here for fun they wouldn't depend on oars all the time, when the wind would send them along very much faster."

There could be no question but that Ned's argument was a good one, and the boys watched eagerly for some signs of life.

An hour passed, and neither had thought it might be well to economize the time by getting breakfast.

Now the floating object could be seen quite distinctly, for both the current and the light breeze was setting it directly toward the key.

There was no longer any question as to what it was.

They could distinguish the bow and stern as the little craft was raised on the gentle swell, and Ned finally said:

"She's a boat about the size of the three I saw on board the Evening Star, and most likely has gone adrift from some vessel. If there was anybody on her we should have seen them before this."

"It'll be a mighty lucky thing for us if she comes ashore here, for we shall be able to leave this place as soon as we have dug up the rest of your silver," Vance suggested.

Singularly enough, the others had not thought of this, and it seemed as if fortune was favoring them wonderfully.

"It won't be much of a job to rig up a spar and make a sail out of our canvas," Roy said, and Ned began to regret her coming, for with such a means of departing from the island he feared his companions would not be willing to assist in saving the Zoe.

"We might as well have breakfast," Vance suggested. "It will be at least two hours more before she comes ashore, and there's no reason why we should stand here like statues."

This remark reminded Roy of his duties, and he went at once to the range, where he was soon engaged in preparing the morning meal, stopping

every few moments to look at the on-coming boat.

When breakfast had been cooked and eaten the craft was within half a mile of the shore, and no one believed she had an occupant, because as yet not a sign of life had been seen.

Ned was the first to note the fact that she was hardly in as perfect a condition as had been fancied.

"Look at her port rail when she comes up on the waves once more!" he cried. "I believe it has been stove."

"It certainly appears like that," Roy replied after a careful scrutiny, and as she drifted nearer it was soon ascertained that she was hardly more than a wreck.

Such a sea as might have been kicked up by an ordinary breeze would have swamped her at once, and Roy fancied he had solved the question as to how she chanced to be drifting around in that vicinity.

"There has been a collision at sea not far away, and this craft was torn out of the davits. According to my way of thinking, there must have been a couple of vessels near here last night."

"It's precious little good that would have done us if they kept out of sight or passed the key while we were asleep," Vance grumbled. "Perhaps we ought to stand watch during the night."

"That wouldn't effect very much, for we shouldn't be able to see any great distance, and I don't suppose an ordinary craft's lights make much of a show half a mile away."

"It isn't likely we'd— Look there!" Ned cried excitedly, interrupting himself as the boat was swung around by the swell just as she was sliding down from the crest of a wave and the interior was momentarily exposed to view.

Both Vance and Roy had seen the same thing which had attracted Ned's attention so suddenly, and they were very pale.

"What did you make out?" the former asked, as if distrusting his own eyes.

"A dead man," Ned replied solemnly.

"That is what I thought I saw," Roy added.

During several moments neither of the party spoke.

It seemed like an ill omen to have this craft with its freight of death borne by an unseen force directly to the place where they had been cast by the wickedness of man and the fury of the elements.

The boat with her ghastly crew was coming straight for them as if steered by the lifeless man, and no course could have been more true had she been fully manned.

"It's either some sailor who has lost his vessel at sea and been drifting around until he starved to death, or one who was in this boat when the collision——"

"There are two of them!" Vance cried as the little craft rolled shoreward once more.

"Perhaps they ain't dead!" Ned exclaimed, and the possibility that these apparent corpses might be sufferers to whom life could be restored took from the scene much which had appeared uncanny.

The boys advanced to the very edge of the surf, ready to pull the craft ashore as soon as she should strike the sand, and ten minutes later she was so near that everything on board could be distinctly seen.

There was no longer any hope the occupants were alive.

Neither was it any question as to how they had died.

The interior of the little craft was covered with blood, and several ghastly slashes across the face of one told that it had been a duel to the death.

It was left for Ned to add the crowning horror to this terrible tragedy.

"It's Captain Bragg and his mate, Mr. Stout!" he cried, and then covered his face with his hands as if unable longer to look upon the horrible scene.

The boys could readily picture all that had taken place on the boat.

The Evening Star had probably been scuttled as agreed upon between the two officers, who had most likely left the sinking brig in a boat by themselves.

Then a quarrel had arisen, perhaps in regard to the division of the spoils, and, armed with knives if nothing more, the duel had been fought.

To the affrighted three on the beach it seemed as if they could see the hideous tragedy as the men, frantic with passion, faced each other in that frail craft.

How she must have tossed to and fro beneath their heavy tread! How many waves had been shipped while they were locked in the last wild clutch, and what must have been the thoughts of the dying survivor as he sat in front of his lifeless adversary, knowing he would soon join him on the last voyage, which would end only when they were brought before the all-seeing Judge to answer not only for this, but all the crimes they had ever committed!

"I would be willing to stay on this key a mighty long while rather than leave in that craft," Vance said with a shudder, and neither he nor his companions thought any longer that a way of escape

had been opened to them by the coming of the boat.

It was destined, however, that there should be no possibility of their ever putting to sea in the craft which had brought such a cargo of crime's evidences.

Within twenty yards of where they were standing a fringe of coral rose nearly to the surface of the water, and when the boat was almost over this a short wave lifted her on high. Then, receding, it allowed the half-wrecked craft to drop directly upon the knife-like coral.

The timbers were divided as if with a saw, and the dead bodies of the murderers flung out inside the small reef, where the action of the water caused them to advance and retreat as if swimming in sport.

The boys would have thought it possible the men were yet alive, owing to these grotesque movements, but for the fact that they had been watching them so long, and after one quick, frightened glance at the hideous corpses, the castaways, with a common impulse, ran to the tent to shut out from view the horrible scene.

CHAPTER X.

TREASURE-SEEKING.

Not until they were in the tent cowering among the bedclothes as if fearing they might have been pursued by specters did either of the party realize how foolishly he was acting.

Ned was the first to rise to his feet and step outside the camp.

"See here, fellows," he said after gazing toward the place where such a terrible sight had been seen, and noted the fact that the fragments of the boat were drifting past the island, "we mustn't allow ourselves to be such fools. It was the swirl of the water that made those bodies swim around in that fashion."

"Of course it was; but how horrible they looked!" Roy replied.

"That's a fact; but we've got to brace up and get them out of the way. Most likely they'll stay inside the reef until a storm throws them ashore, unless we do something."

"What do you mean?"

"We are bound to bury them."

"I wouldn't go within fifty yards of where they are," Vance said tremblingly. "It seemed as if they were trying to catch us."

"Now you are talking nonsense. We have got to stay here, that's certain, and it won't do to have a place that we're afraid of. It would be mighty disagreeable to see those corpses every time we were forced to pass there, and our only course is to get them under the sand as soon as possible. It won't be so bad if we do the work now as if we waited and imagined all sorts of horrible things."

"Ned is right," Roy said as he stepped to the door of the tent, trying unsuccessfully to appear brave. "It will be a disagreeable job, and therefore should be finished at once."

"And we've got to have their graves where we must look at them every day? It is horrible!" and again Vance covered his face to shut out the pictures conjured up by imagination.

"We'll drag them to the other side of the island where I was landed, if that will make the matter any better," Ned replied. "It'll be a long, hard job, but 'way ahead of feeling that we could never go near the spot again, for now they are in plain sight from where the yacht lies."

"How will you haul them across?" Roy asked.

"Pull them on to a piece of canvas; roll it up and tie it securely, leaving an end to which a drag-rope can be fastened. It will take the greater portion of the day, and we'd better get about it at once."

Roy forced himself to put from his mind all that was hideous in the matter and treat it as a necessary, though disagreeable, task which must be accomplished.

He and Ned selected from their stores one of the steamer's jibs, cut it into such sized pieces as was thought sufficiently large for the purpose, and marched resolutely out to the spot where the boat had been shattered.

Vance was ashamed to remain idle while they were working and after a brief delay joined them.

It devolved upon Ned to secure the bodies, which he did by wading into the surf and passing a noose under and around them.

Then he also was forced to roll them in the canvas shrouds; but after this had been done, and the ghastly freight presented the appearance of merchandise rather than human forms, Vance was ready to assist in the task of dragging them across the island.

"We shall need a couple of shovels," Ned said when everything was in readiness for the journey.

"Vance shall carry them, and he can spell one of us when we're tired."

This was a division of labor at which no one could complain, and the fatiguing journey was begun, the heavy weight causing the most severe labor necessary in order to pull them through the sand.

It was a great undertaking to convey the bodies so far, but all three of the boys believed they were fully warranted in such an expenditure of strength and energy, because of the relief of mind which would be theirs when the corpses were so far from the camp that even the burial-place could not be seen.

It was considerably past noon when they arrived at the opposite shore, and then it was necessary to dig the grave.

Owing to the fact that the deposit of sand on the coral foundation of the island was shallow, this was not a long nor a difficult task, and the boys felt a decided sense of relief when the canvas shrouds were hidden from view.

Both murderers, and both murdered, they shared a common grave where their bones might at any time be disturbed by the action of the waves, and there was little doubt but that during the next severe storm the bodies would be disinterred.

There was nothing the boys could do to prevent this unless they had been willing to bury them in the center of the island overlooking their camp, which would be in the highest degree disagreeable.

The spot selected was where Ned had been landed, and there was a certain poetic justice in thus leaving the two where they had left the boy who had been so unfortunate as to have heard their guilty secret.

"It's lucky for me they concluded that I must be marooned," Ned said as they retraced their steps over the hot, shimmering sand. "If they hadn't done that most likely I'd been taken in the boat with them to prevent my telling the men what I'd heard, an' in that case where would I be now?"

"Overboard, I reckon," Roy replied in a tone of awe. "It must have been a terrible fight before the first man died, and you would have been forced over the side while they were leaping around trying to kill each other. Spider Key has used you mighty well, according to my way of thinking."

"That's a fact, and I'm expecting to have yet better luck here. When we get back to camp I'm goin' to open up a scheme to you fellows, an' I hope you'll see things in the same light I do."

"What's in the wind now?"

"I'll tell you when we get back. The day is so

nearly spent that it won't pay to begin work until morning, an' we shall have plenty of time to talk."

The others were obliged to curb their curiosity as best they could, for Ned absolutely refused to gratify it until they were where a conversation could be carried on in a comfortable manner.

After the disagreeable work and the general excitement and horrors of the morning, none of the party felt particularly hungry, therefore Roy served a cold lunch for dinner, promising a more hearty meal at night.

"It's so late now that if I tried to do very much cooking it would be sunset before the job was finished," he explained.

"This is good enough for me," Ned replied as he helped himself to some sea biscuit and a generous slice of cheese.

"Then while you are eating suppose you give us a glimpse of that famous scheme. It is better to talk about almost anything rather than sit here thinking of what we have just seen," and Vance moved nearer, as if the closest possible companionship was necessary in order to drive away the memories of the morning.

"It isn't so very much that I've got to say, but it counts for a good deal in my mind. To begin with, we want to get away from here as soon as we can."

"That goes without saying, and especially now," Roy replied with a nervous laugh.

"And it may be a year before any craft comes this way."

"I'm not prepared to admit quite as much as that, for a vessel of some kind must happen around before so much time elapses."

"Well, we would get tired in considerably less than six months. While there is plenty to be done a fellow don't have a chance to get lonesome; but how about when there's nothin' to do but walk around thinkin' of where we'd like to be?"

"Of course we shall be lonesome then," Vance replied impatiently. "I wish we were certain of getting away as soon as we'd overhauled the hulk, for in the course of a week our folks will understand that something has happened to us, and it'll be terrible to know they are feeling bad when we are all right."

"Then instead of waitin' for a craft to come, which may never happen, why not do all we can toward rescuing ourselves?"

"How can we accomplish more than we are now doing?"

"By launching the yacht."

"You're crazy," Vance replied impatiently.

"We never could do it, no matter how hard we

might try," Roy added, as if the idea was so preposterous that it was worse than useless to discuss it.

"You are both wrong," Ned said quietly. "The job can be done if we set about it in a proper manner, and if you'll agree to work with me three days, I'll show you it isn't so much of an undertaking as you seem to think."

"Why, we couldn't put her on an even keel, let alone get her off the bank."

"I'll have her swung around in forty-eight hours and ready for launching two days after that," Ned said doggedly.

"How would you go to work?"

"In the first place I'd carry both anchors as far as the cables would run, make them fast to the capstan, and, aided by the tide, haul in until she was pulled up on her keel."

"Should you swim out with the anchors?" Vance asked with just a tinge of sarcasm perceptible in his tones.

"How long would it take to build a raft?"

"If you were going to do that it would be best to make one large enough to carry us to the mainland."

"We haven't the materials for that. A small one would answer our purpose in floating her, and

I can rig up such a craft alone. Say, suppose you two dig for the treasure and leave me to get ready? I won't ask you to help me more than an hour the first day, and then when I call on you for regular work you may decide whether my plan can be carried out."

Ned was so deeply in earnest his companions could not but be impressed, and Vance, realizing that by agreeing to this proposition he would be able to get at the treasure-seeking just so much the sooner, replied:

"I'm willing if Roy is."

"And I shouldn't be surprised if Ned was correct in what he says," the cook added thoughtfully. "A few men have moved a large ship before now, and I don't see why, with so much in the way of material for working, the Zoe could not be gotten into deep water."

"She can!" Ned exclaimed, rendered even more excited than before by his partial success in convincing his companions. "What will be the difference between floating her and finding silver dollars? She is worth three such lots of coin as I dug up, and even if there is more treasure in the hulk, the chances are that there isn't as much as would pay for her."

"She cost $8,000," Roy replied.

"Think of it! We know how to earn that much money, or save it, which amounts to the same thing, and yet are not willing to make one trial. She isn't hurt any to speak of, and even if half a dozen timbers have been shattered, it wouldn't cost a great deal to replace them."

"But we shall probably be unable to work the engine in case you get her off the bank."

"Well, what of that? If a vessel comes along, we can have her towed into port. She will lay in the little bay as snug as a bug in a rug if we moor her properly, but is bound to go to pieces in case the next heavy gale finds her where the surf can beat directly upon her bottom."

It was impossible not to be convinced by the arguments which Ned brought forward, and the boys began to consider seriously the idea of escaping from the key by means of the yacht. He seemed to be so positive it could be accomplished that they fancied it was a very much more simple matter than had at first been supposed.

Vance insisted, however, that the proposition should stand as first made.

"You get things in order for floating the yacht, and Roy and I will see what there is under the sand which covers the old hulk. We can come up to help you at any time, and when you are ready for the

more serious part of the business we shall have finished our job."

As a matter of fact Ned would have preferred that they work together, since the task could be accomplished in so much less time when there were hands enough to carry everything forward at the same moment; but he could not well object after having been the one to propose it, and thought he had succeeded very well in effecting this much.

There was no intention of beginning any new labor now that the night was so near at hand.

All were both tired and depressed because of the scenes through which they had passed, and they remained in the tent discussing Ned's plan until it was time to prepare another meal.

After this had been eaten Ned and Vance were eager to retire, the former that he might be ready to begin work on the yacht at an early hour, and the latter in order to commence the search for treasure at the earliest possible moment.

Both were awake before the sun showed his face above the waters, and Roy was surprised by the offers of assistance he received.

When breakfast had been finished Ned went on board the wreck to map out his work, but Vance was forced to wait until the cook had finished his regular morning tasks, for the two were to overhaul the old hulk in company.

Ned had no fears as to the result of his labors, providing nothing occurred to prevent him from doing as he wished, and as the anchor-laying was the most important, he began that at once by building a raft.

Had the others been with him this task would have been comparatively a light one, but forced to work at a disadvantage because alone, he had hardly got the first layer of timbers secured in place, when a series of wildest yells from the vicinity of the hulk attracted his attention.

"If I thought they'd found another box I wouldn't stir a step from this place," he said to himself; "but it may be they are in trouble of some kind, and I s'pose I must find out."

Making fast his timbers that they might not float away and thus necessitate the additional labor of preparing more, Ned started at full speed through the grove, and on arriving at the opposite side saw Vance and Roy dancing wildly around an excavation in the sand, alternately calling him by name and yelling after the fashion of a Comanche Indian.

"They've dug out more money!" Ned cried, and for the time being the raft and the yacht were forgotten, for he could be as enthusiastic over treasure-finding as either of the others.

"What have you got?" he cried, dashing forward at a swift pace.

"Come and see!" Vance shouted. "Hurrah for Spider Key! Hurrah for ourselves! Hurrah for the pirates' treasure!"

There was certainly sufficient to cause excitement.

When he arrived at the scene of their labors it was only necessary for Ned to peer over the huge wall of sand which had been thrown up, in order to see four boxes lying side by side, exactly like the one he had previously found.

It was evident they had been stored in the very stern of the craft, probably under the cabin floor, as was customary when sailing vessels carried much treasure, and who could say how many years the wealth had been lying on the shore of Spider Key, awaiting the chance which should lead to its discovery?

"That's the same sort I found!" Ned cried, equally as much excited now as the others. "Let's have them out of there. We'll get back to camp an' open the boxes!"

Two of the packages were much heavier than the rest, and Vance said:

"These fellows are full of gold! Talk about mining in California! Why, it isn't a marker alongside of this way of finding money all coined and ready to spend!"

The boys had a difficult task to raise the boxes from their long resting-place, and the united strength of all three was necessary in order to place them above the wall of sand.

"You've got the whole of it this time," Ned said as he wiped the perspiration from his face and turned to look at the spot from which the treasure had been removed. "How long did it take you to shovel all that sand away?"

"Not such a very great while. We wanted to make certain of getting at the entire collection, so Roy began on one side and I the other. We had cleared almost the whole space before striking the boxes."

It was fully half an hour before the treasure-seekers recovered from their excitement sufficiently to take any steps toward conveying their treasure to the tent, and then it was decided to make a sort of litter with poles, for the weight of two of the packages was too great to admit of their being carried by one boy.

As a matter of course this required considerable time, and it was an hour past noon when Vance began to chop at the top of the first box for the purpose of opening it.

The wood was not so rotten but that a good deal of labor was necessary in order to effect his purpose,

and then exclamations of delight burst from the lips of all.

This was one of the heaviest boxes, and, as Vance had predicted, was filled with gold coins, the majority of them having come from a Spanish mint.

Owing to the fact that they were unable to determine the value of many of the pieces, it was impossible to figure up the amount of the "find;" but, judging from the weight, in comparison with that of the silver, the total sum was very large.

Vance was not satisfied until he had opened all four of the boxes, finding gold in two and silver in both the others.

"It isn't a pirate's hoard, that's certain," he said after looking at the wealth until his eyes fairly ached. "But never mind who it may have belonged to once, there can be no question but that it's ours now by right of discovery."

CHAPTER XI.

THE YACHT.

THAT they were the possessors of a large sum of money there could be no question, and after he fully realized this very pleasing fact, Vance was as eager as any of his companions to escape from the key.

To Ned's delight he had come to believe that it was in the highest degree important they should leave the island in the Zoe, and was now as ready to push forward the work on her as he previously had been to search for the hidden treasure.

"If a vessel should come along this minute and offer to take us off, I don't see how we could leave," he said as he stood gazing at the money.

"Why not?" Roy asked in surprise.

"Because we couldn't carry all this wealth away without the fact being known, and I shouldn't like to trust everybody with the secret that these boxes were filled with gold and silver."

"Then you are ready to aid in launching the Zoe?" Ned said interrogatively.

"Of course I am. We mustn't waste a single moment. Help me stack these boxes up under the tool-chest, and we'll get to work as soon as Roy cooks dinner."

"If I'd known how it was goin' to affect you I'd voted to go ahead with the treasure-finding two or three days ago; but I thought it would take very much longer to clear that hulk of sand."

"There hasn't been any time lost. Do you think it will be many days before we can have the yacht afloat?"

"I hope not. It seems as if three of us should be able to do a great deal in a short while. Suppose you and I tackle the raft while Roy is doing the cooking? That will put us ahead just so much."

The treasure had been stowed away near the beds, and Vance was more than willing to act upon Ned's suggestion.

He followed him to the scene of his morning's labors, and when Roy finally called them to dinner Vance grumbled not a little because it was necessary to cease the work in order to eat.

"We must have the anchors out before sunset," he said emphatically, much as if expecting his companion would object.

"Of course, for then we'll be takin' advantage of the night tide."

"And we shall get along much faster, because Roy will be here to help us."

Vance hardly allowed his companions time to eat their dinner properly.

He urged first one and then the other to make more haste, until Roy said quite sharply :

"This morning you thought it was the same as wasting time to work on the yacht, and now you're not willing to do the thing in a reasonable way. I shall eat all I want, and even then there'll be plenty of daylight in which to accomplish as much as Ned has laid out for this day's work."

Vance was forced to restrain his ardor, since the others were not willing to keep at the job with such a rush, and the result was that very much more labor was performed than if he had been allowed the direction of affairs.

The raft was finally built as strongly as Ned thought necessary, and the largest anchor with plenty of cable loaded on it.

It was no slight task to paddle the unwieldy craft out to sea with the heavy hawser trailing astern, and dragging back until oftentimes more advantage would be lost than gained.

Vance assisted Ned, both using the oars as paddles, and Roy remained on the wreck to pay out the cable.

It was necessary to strain every muscle to accomplish the purpose, but it was finally done, and the boys pulled swiftly back to the yacht to ascertain, by bringing the rope to the capstan, what kind of holding ground they had.

"Now rouse her in!" Ned cried as he took a double turn and prepared to hold the slack. "Walk her around, an' we'll soon know whether that blessed anchor has got to be picked up again."

It was not necessary to make any change.

When the hawser was hauled as taut as was possible with such a heavy rope, the anchor held firm, and Ned said in a tone of satisfaction:

"There's the biggest half of our work done! Now we must make this cable fast somewhere else until the other anchor is in place. By working lively we can finish it before dark."

This seemed like rather a rash statement, since the sun was already very near the horizon, but so rapidly did the little crew work that the task was accomplished before night had fully come, and the boys had the satisfaction of seeing the two ropes stretched far out into the water like strands of iron.

"I reckon we can call this a full day's work," Ned said as he brought the raft around on the shore side of the stranded yacht. "If we find those ropes a little slack to-morrow morning, we shall know she has slipped off just that much."

"But suppose it doesn't happen?" Roy asked.

"Then it'll be a question of using our muscle at the next high tide, and bringing out a portion of the machinery to lighten her."

"If we take the engine apart we shall never be able to get it together again," Vance said in alarm.

"That doesn't make any difference. We shall have to do it if this plan don't work, and then try to get her along under sail. We've got canvas enough to fit her out in pretty good shape."

"There won't be any show of going very fast with the screw dragging behind."

"I'll be satisfied if we make two knots an hour, for that's more than we're doing now."

The boys were thoroughly tired when they returned to the tent, but so much had been accomplished since sunrise that they were hardly aware of their weariness.

The treasure was only spoken of now and then, but Vance and Roy talked almost incessantly of floating the yacht, and Ned felt well satisfied that before very long they would be sailing in search of the mainland.

The possibility of getting free from the island suggested to his mind something which he had paid very little attention to before.

"How shall we know what way to steer when we are ready to leave?"

"Jimminey! I never thought of that," Vance exclaimed. "I haven't the slightest idea where the coast of Florida is, except that it seems as if it should be in that direction," and he pointed toward the west.

Roy felt quite positive they ought to steer a northerly course, while Ned, having been locked in the state-room so long before coming ashore, was unable to form any idea whatever.

"We shall be an interestin' kind of a crew when we do get started," he said with a laugh. "How are we to decide the matter?"

"I know I'm right," Vance replied decidedly.

"And I'm convinced the mainland lies to the north of us," Roy added in quite as positive a tone.

"I don't know anything about it, so it will be necessary for you fellows to fight it out among yourselves."

"Of course you'll agree that we want to get back to Key West rather than attempt to go to Savannah?" Vance said to Roy.

"Certainly."

"Well, suppose this key is on the very edge of the line of shoals, and we steer due north: there's a possibility of our striking straight across to where we were originally bound, which wouldn't be pleasant."

"Well, what if we went to the west?"

"We are positive this key isn't south of Key West, and if we run a westerly course we're bound to strike some land between here and the Gulf of Mexico."

"It's my opinion that Vance has got the best of this argument," Ned said with a laugh, and Roy replied:

"I reckon he has, and I'll get supper if you fellows will turn to and help. After dragging on those heavy ropes it doesn't seem as if I had strength enough to feed myself."

All were hungry, but felt at the same time so tired that the exertion of cooking seemed too great to be thought of, and Ned proposed that they content themselves with a cold supper.

"I can soon build a fire on the ground large enough to cook the coffee, and that will be all we shall need."

The others were perfectly willing to agree to this proposition, and the last work of the day was quickly dispatched.

Then the boys lay down to rest, and neither of them felt like prolonging a conversation when their eyes were so heavy.

Before nine o'clock the three were sleeping soundly, and it seemed to Vance that he had but

just lost himself in slumber, when he was aroused by what sounded very much like a groan, as if a human being was in agony.

There were cold, bead-like drops of perspiration on his face as he raised himself to a sitting posture and listened.

The unearthly sound was repeated, and he trembled with fear, while before his eyes came a picture of the horrible sight he had witnessed during the forenoon.

Now Vance was not a boy who believed in ghosts or anything of that kind, but he knew perfectly well there were no other persons on the island, and yet here was a noise apparently close at hand, which must have been made by a human being.

"Of course those men whom we buried were dead," he said to himself, "and if I waken the fellows they'll insist I'm afraid of my own shadow."

He was about to lie down again when the unearthly sound floated on the night air once more, and this time he fancied it came from some point nearer the tent than before.

There was no longer any fear in his mind that Ned and Roy would think him cowardly.

Anything was better than listening to such noises while his companions were unconscious in slumber, and he shook Ned, who chanced to be nearest him, violently.

"What's the matter?" the sleepy boy asked as he rubbed his eyes.

"Hush! Don't speak so loud! I've been hearing the queerest kind of a noise. It sounds as if some one was on the island."

Ned's eyes had closed again while Vance was talking, and the latter shook him yet more violently than before.

"Wake up and listen. It may be that men have landed, and we must look out for the treasure!"

This was sufficient to render Ned very wide awake, and he raised himself on his elbow as he said:

"I don't hear anything."

"Wait awhile and you will."

It was not necessary for Ned to listen many seconds; Vance had hardly ceased speaking when the noise was heard again, and one would have failed to decide which boy was the most frightened.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MYSTERY.

Ned was unable to form any idea as to the cause of such a doleful sound.

He knew, or thought he did, that there was no one on the key when they lay down, and yet there could be no mistaking the fact that something unusual was going on.

The most natural course appeared to be the awakening of Roy, but this was not accomplished without considerable difficulty, for the cook was a very sound sleeper, and on this particular night it seemed as if his eyelids were glued together.

It might have been really impossible to arouse him if, just at the moment when he was more nearly awake than at any time since Ned began operations, the groan had not been heard.

This time it was of a most doleful kind, and so loud that one might have heard it half a mile away.

Roy was wide awake in an instant, asking wildly as he scrambled to his feet:

"What was that?"

"We've been trying to find out," Ned replied. "I can't think of anything around here that could make such a noise. It's horrible!"

"Light one of the lanterns."

"What good will that do?"

"If any one attempts to get in here we shall be able to see what is going on," Roy whispered.

"And if the thing which made the noise is bent on mischief, the light of the lantern showing through the canvas might make matters worse."

"But we must try to learn what's the matter."

"I'll creep softly out if you fellows will follow. I'm willin' to admit that it frightens me an' don't care to take the chances of going alone."

"I'll stay close at your heels."

Ned started, but did not attempt to rise to his feet.

Convinced that an enemy was near at hand, such a course hardly seemed prudent, and he wriggled along over the sand until it was possible to gain a view of that portion of the island directly in front of the tent.

The stars were shining brightly and he could see surrounding objects distinctly, but nothing unusual met his gaze.

As a matter of course it was impossible to peer through the grove in the gloom, and while he was

wondering if some animal was not among the trees, the fearsome noise was heard again.

It appeared to come from the rear of the tent, and Ned turned back to whisper to his companions:

"I can't see a thing, but whatever has come must be in our rear. Shall we go out?"

"We've got to learn what it is."

"I think some animal has swum up from the sea. At all events, we'll soon know. Don't make the slightest noise as you follow me."

Then very cautiously Ned crept out until he had a full view of the shores and as far back in the interior as the center of the island.

There was not so much as a bird to be seen, and what seemed very strange, the groan was not repeated, although they listened intently fully five minutes.

Then he rose to his feet and his companions did the same.

The most perfect silence reigned save for the soft lip, lip, lipping of the water on the sandy shore.

"Well, that beats me!" Ned said aloud after ten minutes had passed and nothing was heard. "It can't be that all three of us have been dreaming."

"There was more than a dream in that terrible noise," Vance replied with a shudder.

Ned led the way completely around the tents and then to the edge of the grove without having discovered anything.

"It's certain we haven't visitors, and the best thing we can do is to go to bed again."

"I shan't be able to get another wink of sleep to-night," Vance said in a voice that trembled woefully.

"Then you'll be on hand to let us know if it comes again. But I won't make fun of you," he added as he saw the look of horror on his companion's face, "for it was enough to frighten a wooden man, and I was as badly scared as any one. There's no use in staying out here any longer now we're certain nothing's in sight."

Ned led the way back to the tent, and once there Roy took good care to light two lanterns.

"It won't do any harm to leave them burning," he said half-apologetically. "If we hear the noise again we can at least see each others' faces, and there'll be some little comfort in that."

Neither of the party felt very much like indulging in slumber for a long while, and they sat cross-legged on their beds talking in whispers of what was to them, as indeed it might have been to any one, the most profound mystery.

No reasonable theory could be formed regarding

it, and after an hour had passed with nothing to cause additional fear, one after another of the little party began to grow sleepy, until all were slumbering soundly once more.

If there were any more groans on the island during the night the castaways were in blissful ignorance regarding them, and not until the sun had been up from his bath in the sea fully an hour did either of the party awaken.

Ned was the first to open his eyes, and after rousing his companions he ran out of the tent to look for strange footprints in the sand.

If their unwelcome visitor had come from the sea there must have been some signs left behind, yet Ned failed to find any.

He returned to the tent with joyful tidings, however.

"The yacht must have worked herself off some during the night!" he cried. "The hawsers are considerably slacker than when we saw them last, and I fancy she isn't heeled over quite so much."

Vance and Roy ran out of doors to assure themselves by a personal inspection that such was the case, and the former said, after looking scrutinizingly at the little steamer:

"I think you are right, Ned, and I sincerely hope so. If that craft was afloat I wouldn't sleep

another night on this island. I can stand a good deal, but when it comes to living where dead men are prowling around, then I get more than I need."

"You surely are not foolish enough to believe that what we heard last night was caused by those wretches whom we buried," Roy said in surprise.

"Tell me what else could have made the noise, and I'll own up to being foolish."

"Of course I can't do that; but this much I've got sense enough left to understand, that there's no such things as ghosts."

"Then what made the noise?"

Roy turned away unwilling to continue such a profitless conversation, and Ned said decidedly:

"If it is heard again I'll get at the bottom of the mystery, or know the reason why. We should have gone directly outside when the noise was first heard."

"You were prowling around soon enough to distinguish anything, if it could be seen," Vance persisted, "and I have an idea you failed to find the tracks you counted on."

"How did you know that?"

"I watched while you were searching, and, of course, understood what you expected to see."

Ned joined Roy at the tent without making any further reply.

He did not believe in ghosts, but at the same time it made him just a trifle nervous to have Vance attribute the disturbance to an unearthly source.

There was too much work to be done before sunset to permit of spending many moments discussing what was so profitless as the subject of ghosts.

The hawsers were to be hauled in until they should be as taut as on the night previous, and Ned was revolving in his mind the use of blocks and wedges to bring the yacht on an even keel more quickly.

In order to perform this labor, however, it was necessary all hands should assist, therefore Ned was forced to remain idle until after breakfast had been prepared and eaten.

This did not prove to be such a very long task, owing to the fact that all hands assisted in the work, and at a reasonably early hour the wreckers were ready for business.

The hawsers were drawn as taut as possible once more, and Ned said in a tone of satisfaction when this had been done:

"There; now it's for the tide to do the rest. If it helps us as much as it did last night, we shan't have to work a very long while in order to get her into the bay. Now we'll rig something to shore her up on this side, and that will come pretty near finishing the day."

He set about this portion of the work with such zeal and determination that the others, urged on by their fear caused by the noises heard on the previous night, were soon laboring with feverish eagerness, and before the tide had turned all had been done that was possible until the hawsers should need tautening once more.

"Now we can afford to rest," Ned said as he walked slowly toward the tent, wiping the perspiration from his face.

"And it's high time," Roy replied with a laugh. "It plays a fellow out mighty fast to keep at a job when the weather is so very warm. I don't believe I should ever make a very good citizen for this part of the country."

"Why not?"

"Because the heat pulls me down so severely."

"You would soon get accustomed to working in the early morning and late at night," Vance replied. "That is the way people do in the tropics."

"I notice you don't take kindly to turning out so very early," Roy replied as, they having arrived at the tent, he flung himself upon one of the mattresses.

"But it is most likely I should if I got in the habit of indulging in a siesta every noon, the same as we saw those fellows at Key West."

Ned took no part in this conversation. He had followed Roy's example, so far as lying down was concerned, but his mind was fully occupied trying to devise some means for floating the Zoe more quickly than it could be done by waiting for the tide to pull her off the shore.

It was not many moments before all the party were in a proper mood for the siesta, which seems so necessary in warm climates, and before either was aware of the fact, all three were sleeping soundly.

How long this state of happy unconsciousness lasted no one could say; but all were awakened at the same instant by a repetition of the horrible groaning which had so disturbed and frightened them on the previous night.

As if electrified by one common current, the little party sprang to their feet, and it is no stretch of the imagination to say that Vance's teeth were actually chattering from fear.

"We shall be able to learn what it is this time," Ned said in a whisper as he stepped cautiously toward the flap of the tent.

"That is, if it's anything which can be seen," Roy replied gravely, for he was beginning to share his cousin's views as to the supernatural causes of the blood-curdling sounds.

"Now don't get as foolish as Vance," Ned said sharply, and it is just possible the reproof aided him in controlling his own fears, for even the boldest could not but have been affected in some degree by the groans which appeared to come from the immediate vicinity of the tent.

Cautiously the boy who had been marooned stepped from the camp and looked around.

The sun was beating down upon the glistening sands with quite as much fervor as he had shown at noon-day, and yet not an animate object was within sight.

It would have been impossible for the smallest animal to have moved within the boy's range of vision and escaped his observation.

But even as he gazed around him the terrible noise was repeated.

"It beats me," he said as Roy stepped close by by his side. "I was looking in the same direction from which the sound seemed to come, and failed to see anything."

"Then perhaps you won't make so much fun of me after this," Vance suggested in a trembling voice as he timidly ventured outside with his companions. "You can laugh about ghosts as much as you please, but how else can you account for the noise now, when it is light enough to see every inch of the island?"

"I've always heard it said that ghosts walk, if it is possible for them to do such a thing, only in the night, and yet this one seems to be prowling around while the sun is shining. There must be something in the grove, an' I'm goin' to have a thorough look at the place before I'm willin' to admit the men we buried can come back to make trouble for us."

Ned advanced boldly as he spoke, but his companions did not follow.

It seemed to them as if the tent, frail though it was, might afford some protection against the unearthly visitant, and they preferred to remain where it would be possible to beat a retreat if necessary.

Ned did not pause because of being thus abandoned, as it were, but continued straight on through the underbrush, overturning every fallen branch, or poking amid the creeping vines in the hope of disturbing the author of the terrifying noises.

Twice while engaged in this work did he hear the groans, and on each occasion they sounded as if coming from the rear, much nearer the tent.

"It's no use to hunt here any longer, for whoever is kicking up the row must be behind me."

Now he also was becoming disturbed in mind.

There could be no question but that the unearthly sounds came from that portion of the key where

was not the slightest shelter for man or beast, and he began slowly to retrace his steps.

While doing so he involuntarily glanced toward the ocean once more, and noted the fact that it was nearly high water.

"We shall have to haul in on the hawsers pretty soon, an' I hope that groanin' will stop before then, or else it will be impossible to persuade Vance into lending us a hand."

With this thought in his mind he walked toward the yacht, and was standing within thirty feet of her when the noise was repeated, and this time he distinctly saw the little craft move seaward several inches.

The mystery was explained.

"Hurrah!" he cried with a shout of triumph, and immediately afterward burst into a loud fit of laughter.

"What is the matter?" Roy asked as he ventured out of the tent once more, his face several shades whiter than it had been, for this last groan fully convinced him they were to be haunted by the ghosts of those who had scuttled the Evening Star.

"I've found your spirits, an' only hope they'll keep on groanin', for then we shall have the yacht afloat just so much the sooner!"

"What do you mean?" and Roy gathered suf-

ficient courage to admit of his taking a few steps toward where Ned was standing.

"Watch the yacht, an' you'll soon find out what the trouble is. It's high tide, or will be in half an hour. The hawsers are strainin' hard, an' as she has to slip off the shore there comes a sound as if something was pulled out of the mud."

"But there's no mud here."

"I know it, yet at the same time that is what causes the noise. She fell heavy when she struck, and has made a hole in the sand, where, most likely, the air is confined. Watch five minutes, and then if you're not convinced I'll give my head for a football. Don't spend any more time than necessary, however, for we must help the little craft a bit."

After some difficulty Vance was persuaded to join the committee on investigation, and while they kept their eyes fixed upon the yacht, Ned clambered on board by aid of the raft.

CHAPTER XIII.

AFLOAT.

It was not necessary for the boys to wait very long before the mystery was as plain to them as to Ned.

In a few moments a prolonged and particularly unearthly groan was heard, which began as the Zoe commenced to move seaward and ceased when she stopped.

There could no longer be any question in regard to the matter, and Roy said in a tone of the most intense relief:

"Well, that settles it. I had begun to make a fool of myself, and am mighty glad it's settled at last. If we had left the key without having discovered the cause of the noises, I'm afraid I should have been convinced so long as I lived that this island was haunted by the captain and mate of the Evening Star. What do you think now, Vance?"

"That we've been mighty silly. Almost anybody, except Ned, would have been frightened by such sounds when they knew there wasn't a living thing on the key."

"I might as well own up that I was in a pretty bad funk toward the last of it," Ned replied with a hearty laugh. "That last screech came mighty near settlin' me, an' if I hadn't happened to be standin' close to the yacht when the next one came, I reckon I'd joined you in the tent. But now that the thing is settled, one of you come aboard with me an' help haul in on the longest cable. The other must stay on the raft an' do his best at drivin' the wedges in when we take up the slack."

Vance was on the Zoe's deck almost before Ned ceased speaking, and the two tugged at the capstan until Roy shouted from the raft:

"You've raised her three or four inches already. I've put in new wedges, and if you'll take a whack at the other cable she'll be in fair condition for the next tide."

The boys worked with a will until nearly dark, and then the yacht was in a better position than even Ned had dared to hope for.

She was very nearly on a level keel, a slight heel shoreward only showing that she was aground, and her stern had been hauled around a couple of feet, so much so, in fact, that the lead-line showed deep water directly beneath the screw.

"We must keep awake this night, or leave one fellow on watch," Ned said after the tide had fallen

so much that it would have been a useless expenditure of strength to work longer, "and when it's high water once more I expect to see her afloat."

"It can't be done so soon," Vance said decidedly as they walked toward the tent. "We may possibly succeed by the day after to-morrow; but not before."

"That remains to be seen," Ned replied with a laugh. "We'll get something in the way of dinner, and then decide whether all three or only one shall stand watch."

Now that the "ghost" had been laid, the experiment of floating the yacht evidently a future success, and matters in what Roy called "comfortable shape" once more, the little party was in the best of spirits.

Roy fairly outdid himself in the way of preparing dinner, and the tired wreckers ate until it seemed as if food would never again be necessary.

Since it would not be high water until about midnight, it was thought useless for all hands to remain awake, therefore hourly watches were begun from nine o'clock, the time set for retiring, until twelve, when the work would be commenced once more.

The question of who should "do the first trick" was settled by drawing lots, and it so chanced that Ned was the one selected for the last hour.

He made sleeping a matter of business from the time the first watch was begun until summoned to do his share of the work, and then, in order to drive the remnants of slumber from his eyelids, went out on to the beach for a stroll.

After walking a couple of miles as a means of preparing for the more arduous labor, he returned to the yacht and clambered on board.

The hawsers were stretched taut as bars of iron, and there was every reason to believe the strain upon the anchors was beginning to tell.

Contrary to his expectation the groaning was not heard, probably because the craft had been raised partially out of the sandy bed; but as he stood there watching the water creep up inch by inch upon the white sand, he fancied there was a certain motion to the craft.

"The anchors are pullin' her once more," he said to himself. "I wish it might be possible to get her off before the boys awaken. I don't believe she's now on so very firm, and with the hawsers dragging dead astern a little additional weight would take her off."

The cable connected with the largest anchor was yet made fast to the capstan, and as the yacht quivered again, Ned exerted all his strength to take another turn of the drum.

At first this was impossible, but as the hawsers were slackened he succeeded, and was rewarded by feeling that she continued to move slightly.

"It's now or not until to-morrow!" he said after making certain the water was nearly at its proper height, and shutting his teeth tightly, he gave way on the capstan-bar with every ounce of weight and strength it was possible for him to exert.

Just for an instant he fancied he had made some mistake as to the holding power of the craft, and then the capstan began to revolve as if the cable had suddenly been unloosened.

There was no necessity to look over the side, for Ned could see by the objects ashore that the little steamer was moving rapidly through the water, and a second later there was a slight dip as the bow slipped from the bank.

The Zoe was afloat once more.

Ned came very near giving vent to a cry of triumph, which might have awakened his friends, and that was exactly what he did not want to do.

He wished them to sleep on until morning and, coming out to look for him, see the little craft rising and falling on the swell as if she had never known what it was to come in contact with the bank; therefore he remained silent, hauling in on the cables until she was riding within a short distance of the anchors.

It would have pleased him immensely had it been possible to have pulled the steamer around into the bay, and he would have made the attempt if he had had a boat; but there was too much risk in trying to tow her alone, with the raft as a craft, therefore it only remained to pass the hours of darkness in the most comfortable manner possible.

The port lockers were comparatively dry, and on one of these in the after cabin he prepared to continue his nap; but the feeling of triumph was so strong in his mind that quite a while elapsed before slumber visited his eyelids.

Fortunately, so far as the plans for enjoying his triumph were concerned, he awakened at an early hour, and was on deck busying himself with examining the rigging when Roy appeared at the flap of the tent.

The boy was evidently surprised at not having been called when the tide was at its height, and was looking around for Ned when he saw the change which had been made in the position of the yacht.

For an instant he remained motionless, as if speechless with astonishment, and then gave vent to a series of cheers which brought Vance from the tent in short order.

"How did you get the yacht afloat?" the latter asked in astonishment as he ran to the shore.

"Pulled her off, of course. You fellows believed she couldn't be launched for two or three days, so I thought it would be a good chance to prove you were mistaken."

"You're a brick!" Vance exclaimed enthusiastically. "Bring the raft ashore so we can go on board."

"That is exactly what I propose to do," Ned replied as he clambered over the rail. "There isn't a breath of air stirrin', an' if we pull her around into the bay now, it'll give us an appetite for breakfast."

"Do you think we can do it with that raft?"

"Hold on!" and Ned clambered back to the deck again. "We'll run a line ashore, and with one haulin' on that, while the other two row the raft, I reckon it won't be so very much of a job."

"Go ahead and fix things in any way you see fit," Roy cried encouragingly. "You've shown yourself the captain of this crowd, and from now out Vance and I will obey orders without a word. Eh, Vance?"

"Well, I should say so! If it hadn't been for him we should have left the poor little Zoe on the bank until a storm came and knocked her to pieces."

Ned was decidedly well pleased by these words of praise, but he took good care not to show it.

It delighted him that his companions should thus voluntarily give him credit for having engineered the work successfully, and he was resolved she should be taken into port in good condition, if such a thing was possible.

A line, made fast to the capstan, was soon carried ashore and given in charge of Roy, while Ned took Vance back with him to the yacht.

Then it was simply a matter of hard work to pull the steamer around, and before nine o'clock that morning she was moored in the little bay ready to receive once more the goods which had been taken ashore.

"Now, captain, what's the next thing on your programme?" Vance asked when they were back at the tent and Roy was preparing breakfast.

"I think it would be a good idea for you two to overhaul the machinery, and see if it can be put in running order. I'll take a portion of the stores on board, by way of gettin' ready for our departure."

"But suppose we find that it is impossible to do anything with the engine? You know we don't profess to have very much knowledge of such matters."

"Then it'll be a case of bendin' the sails an' gettin' along the best we can in that way. With main, fore, an' a jib we should be able to strike some port

where you can hire an engineer and sailin' master. You know we've got money enough to indulge in all those luxuries."

The cook did not spend any very great amount of time over the range on this morning.

Now that it appeared possible they might be able to leave the key as soon as the yacht was in sailing trim, each member of the party was eager to be under way, and at the earliest possible moment the amateur engineers went on board.

Ned did not accompany them.

He realized fully how much labor there was yet to be performed before they could begin the voyage, and found plenty with which to occupy himself until Roy hailed him from the deck of the yacht.

"We can't make head nor tail of the machinery, and even if we could I don't think it would be safe for us to attempt to run her any distance under steam."

"All right," Ned replied cheerily. "Suppose you come ashore, and we'll tackle the canvas."

"Are you counting on bending that at once?"

"Of course; it's the hardest part of the job, and should be attended to first."

"But by doing that we shall destroy our tent."

"What's to prevent our livin' on board the rest of the time we're forced to stay here?"

"Crickey! I never thought of that!" Roy exclaimed with a hearty laugh, and five minutes later he and Vance were pulling the raft ashore.

By Ned's instructions the rope which had been used in guiding the yacht around the point into the bay was not cast off when that task was completed, but had been made fast ashore, so that in order to work the raft back and forth it was only necessary to pull either way on the line.

A painter with a sliding loop moored the collection of timbers which was to serve as a boat, and the communication with the shore could be kept up easily and readily.

Ned already had one of the tents down, and this canvas (the foresail) was taken on board without delay.

The boys were by no means experienced sailors, therefore fully twice the time necessary was spent in bending the sail.

When it had finally been completed to the satisfaction of the young captain, Roy insisted that the range be put back in its old place at once.

"There's no use keeping it ashore when a fellow can work so much more easily on board," he said. "From now on we shall be here the greater portion of the time, and the sooner we begin ship duties the better it will be for the cook."

"And he's such an important personage that his comfort must be attended to very carefully," Vance replied laughingly. "It won't take us more than an hour to bring such things here as you'll need."

That noon the little party ate dinner aboard, and a very jolly meal it was.

Roy had taken great pains with his portion of the work, and the consequence was that they had a regular Thanksgiving dinner, as appeared right and proper to all, since they had a great deal for which to give thanks.

It surely seemed as if Ned would never get tired working, so eager was he to be under way once more.

When the others pleaded for a rest he kept steadily on, saying he had rather "be at somethin' than layin' still," and even after nightfall he persisted in bending the jib in order to "save time."

CHAPTER XIV.

UNDER WAY.

During the first day the Zoe was afloat nothing of any consequence had been taken from the store-tent, and, singular as it may seem, Vance had forgotten about the treasure until supper was eaten.

Ned had just begun labor on the jib, when his companion remembered that the gold and silver was yet ashore, and he said in reply to Vance's proposition that it be brought on board at once:

"It's as safe there as here. What's the good of botherin' about it now? If you fellows are so anxious to work, you'll find plenty of chance at the pumps, for there's a good bit of water in the hold."

"But it isn't work I'm after," Vance replied. "I shall feel better if the money is in the cabin."

"It will take you an hour to bring it aboard."

"That is nothing compared to the chance of losing the treasure."

"I don't see how it can be lost, but if you are so worried, there's nothin' to prevent your tacklin' the job."

"Don't you think you'd better bear a hand? If one of those boxes should fall overboard we'd feel mighty blue."

"I'll risk your allowin' anything like that to happen; besides, I can't leave this job half done, unless I sit up to finish it after we get back."

Vance realized that that would be asking too much of the ever-willing laborer, and he insisted that Roy should help him.

The cook had no fear the treasure would be disturbed, even though it did remain on the key without them to guard it, but Vance was so anxious the work should be done that he finally consented, and the last lot was deposited in the cabin about the time Ned finished his task.

From this moment Vance considered himself chosen as the treasurer of the party, and took the wealth under his own charge.

The coins were stored in a small locker aft, which had been used as a wine closet by the previous masters of the yacht, and here it was as safe as could be possible on board ship.

"Now, if the Zoe goes to the bottom we've lost everything," Ned said, not because he feared such a catastrophe, but as a means of causing Vance additional worriment of mind.

"That's a fact!" the treasurer exclaimed, as if

such a possibility had not occurred to him before. "But there's no way out of it, for we would be little less than fools to leave it behind."

"How would it do to furnish each coin with a life-preserver?" Roy asked laughingly.

"That might answer," Ned replied, "and Vance can stand guard over the locker with a gun to prevent their walking away."

"It's all very well for you boys to make sport of what I've done," the treasurer replied grimly; "but it wouldn't have been at all funny if we'd gone on shore to-morrow morning and found it missing.

"Not funny, but strange, considering that there isn't a soul anywhere around," Ned replied.

"That may be true at this minute, but no one knows how soon somebody will land here."

"I don't s'pose there's any good reason why Roy and I should try to be merry at your expense, Vance, for as a matter of course it would have been necessary to bring it aboard some time, and since it has already been done there is just so much less work to be attended to. Now where are we goin' to sleep? This cabin feels as if it had been under water a month."

"Suppose we bunk in the engine-room? By using the blankets to lie on we shall be all right, and to-morrow I reckon this portion of the yacht will be dried out in proper shape."

This suggestion of Roy's was acted upon without discussion, and half an hour later the three boys were sleeping soundly as the little craft rose and fell on the gentle swell.

Next morning the work of making ready for sea was continued without intermission, save during the heat of the day, when Ned allowed his crew a siesta of two hours.

By nightfall very much had been accomplished.

A greater portion of the goods had been lightered from the shore, the sails were bent, and the hold nearly freed from water.

As the custodian of the treasure Vance, thought it necessary to keep a strict watch seaward lest some craft should heave in sight without his knowing it, although what possible injury this might have been to the money, neither Roy nor Ned could understand.

The second day of refitting resulted in the accomplishment of a satisfactory amount of work, according to Ned's ideas, and the third saw the task nearly completed.

With the exception of filling the water-casks the Zoe was ready for sea, and on this evening a very interesting and important discussion took place in the cabin, which was now used as a sleeping apartment, the hangings and upholstering having dried very quickly in the hot climate.

"It is time we settled upon the course we are to steer," Ned said when the three were enjoying the few moments of rest before going to bed. "I count on leavin' this port by nine o'clock to-morrow, and the matter had better be settled now."

"Is everything done?" Vance asked.

"We have yet to fill the water-casks, but that can't take more than a couple of hours."

"It seems that you are counting on having a wind?"

"I'm hoping for one, but if it's calm we shall be forced to lay here a spell longer. In case of a breeze what course shall we steer?"

"What is your opinion?"

"I think we'd better run pretty near west until land is sighted, and then, if that proves to be an uninhabited key like this one, we can steer a little southerly. I saw a chart of the coast which the mate of the Evening Star had, and from that it seemed as if we should be able to get into Key West without losin' sight of land after we get among the keys."

"It seems to me as if it would be better to steer very nearly due north in the hope of striking the reefs. If after sailing a couple of days we shouldn't find what we wanted, it would be an easy matter to put back," Roy said, knowing full well that Vance would object to such a course.

The latter replied very quickly:

"It seems to me that would be a waste of time. Why not do as Ned suggests and turn back from that course if we don't get a squint of the land? It is as broad as it is long, but I believe we shall be nearer right in following his plan."

Roy was not willing to give in so easily, and during the next half-hour quite a heated discussion ensued, but at the end of that time he withdrew very gracefully by saying:

"There's no reason why we should talk so much about what is virtually settled already. You fellows are in the majority, consequently there is nothing to do but let you have your own way. It may be I am in the wrong, for the whole thing is a matter of guesswork, and I can only say I hope you are right, for then we shall arrive at Key West so much the sooner. It seems as if we should get there before our parents have had time to worry about us."

"Do you think we had better telegraph to Savannah?"

"Yes, if they haven't arrived; and it would also be a good idea to send word home, for if the news that the Zoe was missing should get into the papers it would be believed we were dead."

Vance and Roy allowed themselves to discuss the

matter as if they were certain of gaining a port in a few days, and Ned stopped them by saying:

"I wouldn't count too much on gettin' anywhere very soon. With the screw draggin' we shan't make great headway, and it wouldn't be strange if we had it calm a good deal of the time, so you'd better figger on bein' aboard this craft a good many days, even if it should turn out that my idea of the course to be sailed is the right one."

This was rather a wet blanket on the boys' plans, and they ceased speaking of the future very suddenly.

On the following morning Ned, like the prudent skipper, was on deck a long while before the sun showed his face above the water.

A light breeze was blowing from the southeast, and if it held would be fair for them.

Anxiously Ned watched the ripples on the waves, and, to his great delight, the wind freshened instead of decreasing after the sun rose.

"Turn out here and bear a hand with the water-casks!" he shouted from the head of the companion-way. "It'll be time enough to do the cookin' after we've started. The wind is freshenin' an' we must get of here as soon as possible."

Vance and Roy obeyed his call without delay, and the last work which they hoped it would ever

be necessary for them to do on Spider Key was begun.

An hour sufficed, and the shore line was cast off when the last cask had been rolled on to the raft.

The rude craft was hauled alongside and unloaded, the rope thrown inboard, and the collection of timbers which had served them such a good turn was set adrift.

"Now up with the anchors, my hearties!" Ned cried cheerily, "and then stand by to make sail!"

All hands tried to be as much like sailors as possible, and to the music of a very odd-sounding sea-song the cables were hove in until the Zoe was freed from all her moorings.

Then the captain, who knew even less about nautical matters than did his crew, took his station at the halyards, and one by one the little sails were hoisted.

Almost any kind of a fresh-water sailor can run a craft with the wind dead astern, therefore there was no danger of any mistake being made until it should be necessary to change the course; but as he took his station at the wheel, Ned could not fail to ask himself what might be the result before the voyage came to an end.

"I never run a boat before with more than one

sail," he said to himself, "an' am afraid I'll make a mess of it before we got very far; but things can't be much worse than they were when we was on the island waitin' for a craft that never hove in sight."

His unpleasant thoughts were interrupted by a shout from his companions, who were standing directly in front of the pilot-house watching as the yacht glided slowly away from the land.

"We're not only afloat, but moving!" Roy cried, "so let's give three cheers for good luck!"

Vance aided him in thus starting the yacht with proper ceremony, while Ned remained silent, his face wearing an expression of deepest anxiety.

"Why don't you cheer?" Vance asked. "Any one would think you didn't feel glad at getting away from the key."

"I am all the same; but now I can't help feelin' nervous about the trip. Neither of us know how to handle a craft properly, and, to make the matter worse, we can only guess at the direction we want to go. It begins to look more serious than when we were only talkin' the matter over."

"Don't borrow trouble before we've fairly got clear of the land," Roy cried cheerily. "It's enough for me that we're under way, and I'll let the future take care of itself."

CHAPTER XV.

AT SEA.

SAILORING under such circumstances as the boys experienced immediately after leaving the key was decidedly pleasant work, and it appeared to be a very easy matter to navigate a vessel.

The wind was hardly more than what might have been called a gentle breeze, and the Zoe glided through the water at the rate of three or four knots an hour.

Ned was at the helm, and his companions, in order to discuss the question of a course in case land should be sighted suddenly, were also in the pilot-house.

"If it wasn't for the drag of the screw we'd be slippin' along right lively now," Ned said as he looked back at the island they had been so eager to leave.

"According to this we shall need a good stiff wind to make any kind of time," Roy replied thoughtfully, "and how she'll act when we have to tack is more than I can fancy."

"There's no use in borrowing trouble about that," Vance said quickly. "Who knows but we shall hold the wind this way all the voyage?"

"It isn't very likely. Don't you remember that it has nearly always died out about noon, from the first day we struck the key?"

"That is no sign it will do so now."

"No, but there's good reason for believing it may act in the same manner. Which of us is on watch? I suppose one must consider himself doing duty, even though he may be loafing."

"Vance is the lookout, for you can't be spared from the galley; but how are we to work it at night?" Ned asked. "I never thought of that before we started, an' it's goin' to be kinder tough if a feller has to stay at the wheel two or three days without any sleep."

"We must contrive to run into a harbor every day before sunset, and then all hands can turn in," Vance suggested.

"There don't seem to be much chance of that to-night. With no land in sight now, the Zoe couldn't get very near a port between this and nightfall."

"If it is necessary to run after dark we must contrive so that each has the proper amount of rest. By standing half-hour watches there wouldn't be much chance of a fellow getting asleep at the wheel."

"Have we anything aboard in the shape of a clock?" Ned asked. "I don't reckon you've been able to make your watches go since they got such a soakin'?"

"They will need a watchmaker's care before they can do very much toward keeping time," Vance said ruefully as he looked at his, the hands of which had not moved since he landed in such a helpless fashion.

"I shouldn't be surprised if the little clock in the pantry was all right," Roy said after a moment's thought. "It couldn't have got very wet, and perhaps it needs only to be wound."

He left the wheel-house on a tour of investigation as he ceased speaking, and returned a short time later with the article referred to.

"It's all right," he said as he hung it on a hook directly in front of the helmsman. "I don't reckon it will be valuable as a time-keeper, inasmuch as we haven't any very good idea of what hour it is now; but she will serve to show when the watches should be begun or ended."

During another hour the boys discussed the probability of being able to reach Key West within a certain length of time, and then Roy went below to make preparations for dinner.

Vance found the moments hanging rather heavily

on his hands, and presently he lay down for a nap, leaving Ned to work the craft alone.

Fortunately she did not need much guiding. The wind had been gradually decreasing until it died away entirely, and before the noonday meal was ready the yacht lost steerage-way.

It was useless to remain longer at the wheel, and Ned went below to overhaul the cabin on the chance of finding a pair of marine glasses in one of the lockers which had not been overhauled.

In this he was successful, much to his delight, and he went on deck once more in the hope of being able to see land.

He searched the horizon carefully in every direction, but failed to see that for which he sought.

This fact worried him not a little.

"It is almost certain there will be a breeze after the sun sets, and unless the stars shine very brightly we shall be obliged to keep on without knowing whether we're goin' to strike a reef or run out into the ocean."

Now for the first time since he decided in his own mind that it would be possible to carry the Zoe into port did he begin to question the wisdom of such an attempt.

Limited though his experience as a sailor had been, he understood how many chances there were

against success and also the dangers which were in their way.

"It would come pretty tough if I'd insisted on the boys tryin' to get to Key West in this craft, an' it turned out that they were to meet their death by following my advice," he said to himself, and straightway the most dismal forebodings took possession of him.

It was while he was in this mood that he went below, as if needing companionship, and the cook, busily engaged as he was, could not fail to note the lugubrious look on his face.

"Is Vance at the wheel?"

"He's asleep on the locker. It is a dead calm, an' there's no need of anybody standin' there."

"What makes you look so glum?"

"Perhaps it's because I'm just beginnin' to get some common sense into my head."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I'm thinkin' that perhaps we did a foolish thing in tryin' to take this craft into port. I coaxed you an' Vance until you had to give in, an' it would be terrible if anything should happen."

"I reckon you are suffering from an attack of foolishness instead of common sense. We wanted to come, and probably should have insisted on trying to float the yacht or howled after she had been

beaten to pieces because we didn't do such a thing. What has struck you so suddenly?"

"The fact that wesh all be out to-night not knowin' where we're steerin', but obliged to run because I can't heave a craft to."

"I don't reckon there'll be much danger in that. If there's no land to be seen when the sun sets it's precious little chance she'll run any down before morning. Is the island out of sight yet?"

"No, but we've sailed a great deal further than I thought would be possible in so short a time. Of course it is in full view, but you can't distinguish anything on the shore."

"And we couldn't get back if it should become necessary?"

"Not without wind."

"Then the only thing is to make the best of it. All hands of us had rather be here, taking our chances of ever getting into port, than back on the island to make the start over again. So what's the use of being down in the mouth about having been able to do exactly as you wanted?"

It was such talk as this which made Ned feel decidedly comfortable in mind, and by the time dinner had been cooked and eaten he was as jolly as ever.

Until about four o'clock in the afternoon there

was nothing to be done except loaf around wishing for a breeze, and then the wind sprang up again in the same direction as before.

Ned was at the helm when the sails began to flap, and once more the Zoe was gliding through the water with her short bowsprit pointed due west.

Both Roy and Vance were on the lookout, each hoping to see some signs of land, but the hours wore away until the key was only a faint smudge on the horizon, and around them nothing save water.

"We're in for a night-run," Roy said cheerily as the sun began to sink behind the sea, "and most likely by morning we shall have something to guide us."

"It may happen that we shall be forced to trust to the wind for anything of that sort," Ned replied as he pointed to the sky, which was being rapidly covered with fleecy clouds. "I don't know much about weather signs on the ocean, but if I was back in Maine I should say we were goin' to have a storm."

Neither Vance nor Roy thought the swiftly moving masses of vapor portended anything in particular, and the latter went into the kitchen once more, for he was determined that his portion of the work should be attended to in proper shape.

Before he reappeared again there was a very decided change in the aspect of the sky.

The wind had begun to veer around, and continued to increase in violence until it was blowing directly from the north, causing the sea to rise until the little craft wallowed into the trough, throwing the spray high over the deck.

For fully twenty minutes after this change Roy gave no signs of life, and then he came into the wheel-house looking decidedly alarmed.

"It's beginning to blow," he said, as if it was a piece of news which would please his companions.

"We understood that quite a while ago," Vance replied quickly. "Is this the first you knew of it?"

"I could tell by the motion of the yacht that a sea was getting up, but I didn't suppose it was so bad as this. Do you intend running on the same course, Ned?"

"We had to change that when the wind shifted. Now she is headin' due south."

"Why, that means we are running out to sea, surely, no matter which side the chain of keys we were!"

"You're right; but I don't see any other way for it. To take the chances of pilin' up on the land by headin' west would be worse than foolish, and besides, with such poor sailors aboard, we might as

well be on a raft, for the only safe thing to do is to go with the wind. I wonder if you fellows can't reef the sails?"

"Of course we can, and I think it would be a good idea to get out the lanterns, unless we want to be run down."

"I declare I never thought of that!" Ned exclaimed. "Attend to it, will you, and then see what can be done toward shortening the canvas. I'll bear a hand if one of you will take the wheel."

"Stay where you are. I reckon Vance and I can do that much."

"Be careful of yourselves!" Ned cried as the two left the pilot-house. "You know it wouldn't take much of a flap of the sails to knock you overboard."

"We'll look out!" Vance cried, and then the two disappeared down the companion-way to the engine-room in the search for the signal lights.

It was fifteen or twenty minutes before the lanterns were in their places, and then the foresail was lowered as the boys began to ree it.

Meanwhile Ned stood at the wheel trying in vain to peer through the dense blackness of the night, and the little yacht plunged on her way to possible perils—perhaps a second shipwreck.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN ANXIOUS CREW.

Nervous as Ned was for the safety of his friends, it seemed as if they would never finish reefing the sails.

At each unfamiliar sound, and it appeared now as if the laboring yacht was filled with odd noises, he started in fear, fancying it betokened an accident.

He could only hold her steadily to the south, without the faintest idea of where such a course would lead them, and listen to the howling of the wind as it lashed the waves into fury.

Now and then a heavy roller would strike the Zoe on the quarter, causing her to quiver as if a hidden reef had been met, but as a rule she rode very steadily, and well she might, for a stancher little craft had never been launched.

The only fear was that she might have received some injury to her timbers by the contact with the key, and weakened them to such an extent that

these downward plunges and sudden uprisings would open a seam.

During the short time he was on board the Evening Star, Ned had heard the sailors say that the danger to be apprehended in running before the wind was that of being swamped by the following waves; but, so far as he could make out, there was no occasion to fear anything of that kind yet awhile.

Had the boys been on board a craft manned by experienced sailors they would not have thought the wind so strong as to be terrifying.

As a matter of fact it did not even *approach* the fury of a gale, and there is no question but that the Zoe might safely have been kept on her westerly course but for the fear of striking a reef.

It was fully an hour after Roy and Vance began their work before they returned to the wheel-house, and then the former said:

"The fore and main sail are reefed down; but we didn't dare tackle the jib."

"I don't think it will do any harm to let it stay as it is. The canvas isn't large and can't do very much toward putting her along," Vance added "How fast do you think we are going?"

"I wish I knew," Ned said fervently.

"What good would that do?"

"When the wind shifts or morning comes we

could have some idea of how far we are at sea in that case."

"I'll guarantee we shall be outside, where there won't be any danger of striking the land, for she must be going at the rate of eight or ten miles an hour."

"Not more than six or seven at the most," Roy replied in a positive tone. "The sea is kicking up such a bobbery that it seems as if we were moving through the water much faster than really is the case; with the screw dragging we are doing well to make six miles."

"We'll call it six; that will give us somethin' to guess by, at all events," Ned replied. "There's no question but that this is goin' to be an all-night job for the whole crew, and I think you fellers had better get your supper."

"What about you?"

"I'll come down when you have finished."

"I don't think it is safe to leave only one man on deck," Roy said decidedly. "Vance, you go and fill up and I'll stay with Ned till you get back."

This was by all odds the wisest course to pursue, and one by one the three ate their supper.

When it was Ned's turn to sample the cookery he realized more fully than while in the pilot-house how severely the little craft was laboring.

Below deck he could hear the straining of the timbers, the pounding of the waves, and the creaking of doors and lockers until a nervous person might have imagined the yacht had a full crew of ghosts on board.

It was so dismal and almost uncanny that Ned partook of the food very hurriedly, and was glad to be at the wheel once more.

There had been no change in the position of affairs, save, perhaps, that the weight of the wind had increased a trifle.

The yacht was running reasonably easy, and shipped even less water over the bow than one would have supposed while listening to the noises below.

Roy was at the wheel when Ned entered, and he said as the latter offered to relieve him :

"I had just as soon stand here as to be doing nothing. Suppose you try to get some sleep?"

"That is impossible. I never felt wider awake in my life than I do this minute."

"That is the way with me, and I'll stay here awhile longer."

Ned took advantage of this opportunity to crawl aft and see how matters were going there.

So far as his peace of mind was concerned, perhaps it would have been better if he had remained

with his companions, although there appeared to be no question but that the yacht still had sufficient sail on to enable her to keep ahead of the pursuing waves.

It was the general appearance of the water which would have terrified any landsman, and Ned was not proof against such a sight.

There were moments when the huge liquid wall towered high above the stern of the little craft, apparently certain to break upon her, and at each of these watery rushes Ned literally held his breath, expecting each instant to hear the crashing of the timbers as the wave dashed upon the craft.

The foam upon the waves shone with a certain dull, white light, thus revealing the seething mass beneath it, and it was what the beholder imagined that made up the horror of the sight.

When Ned finally groped his way back into the wheel-house he was trembling as if in an ague fit, and, hearing his voice as he spoke to Vance, Roy asked quickly:

"What's the matter? Anything wrong?"

"No; we are getting along even better than might be supposed."

"What makes your voice tremble so?"

"I reckon I must have got chilled. I was standing aft, and this wind is mighty cold, especially to

a fellow who has been livin' in such a hot place as the key."

Roy was not satisfied with this explanation, and fancying there was some new peril of which Ned would not speak, said:

"Take the wheel a few minutes while I go below, will you?"

Ned did as he was requested, and Roy left the pilot-house, returning ten minutes later, and saying to Ned in a low tone which could not be overheard by Vance, who was curled up on one of the lockers:

"I know now why you felt so chilly a few minutes ago."

"Have you been aft?"

"Yes, and it's terrible to watch the waves."

"I suppose they look a good deal worse in the darkness than they really are; but it would give a fellow the horrors to stay there very long."

"It doesn't seem as if the little craft could live through the night."

"Nonsense," Ned replied, speaking very much more confidently than he felt. "This isn't really a gale, and she must be a good sea-boat, otherwise your father wouldn't have thought of coming from Savannah in her."

"It would be very much different if she was under steam."

"I'm not so certain of that. So long as we keep steerage-way on, I can't see why she shouldn't do just as well under sail."

"Perhaps she will," Roy replied with a sigh, and from his tone it was easy to understand that he had his doubts regarding the possibility of outliving the gale, if such it could be called.

An hour later Roy, weary of doing nothing, went into the kitchen to clear away the dishes which had been left as each of the crew finished his supper, and before he returned there was quite a change in the weather.

The wind was veering around from north to east, and again Ned was forced to change the course or call upon his companions to "tend sheets," something which he was not willing to do because of the danger that they might be washed overboard.

When Roy came to the pilot-house again the helmsman said with a laugh which had very little mirth in it:

"It looks as if we were doomed to box the compass this trip," and he motioned toward the binnacle.

"I would rather see that than know we were forced to run directly out to sea all night," Roy replied after a short pause.

"But the question is, where is this new course likely to bring us?"

"That's what I don't know; but it doesn't seem possible there could be any land in our way, certainly not before to-morrow morning."

Ned made no reply.

The voyage was rapidly becoming so erratic that it was no longer possible to so much as guess where it would end, and he tried to resign himself to whatever the fates might have in store for him.

Time passed until the little clock marked the hour of midnight, but no one could say how far that might be out of the way until when the sun rose next morning.

Vance no longer had any anxiety of mind; the motion of the craft had caused slumber to visit his eyelids, and the rolling and plunging was to him like the rocking of a cradle.

Ned and Roy were both standing at the wheel with their eyes fixed upon the inky blackness outside, when, as if she had come from the depth of the ocean, the huge hulk of a ship or steamer loomed directly in front of them, the lights on deck showing indistinctly the forms of several men near the rail.

Had their lives depended upon it, neither could have so much as moved a finger during that awful time when it seemed sure they were to be run down.

Both clutched the spokes of the wheel, but with-

out turning it, and stood like statues, staring through the window until the huge mass disappeared as suddenly as it had come, and the darkness seemed all the more intense because of having been partially dispelled for an instant.

While one might have counted twenty the boys remained silent and motionless after the stranger passed, and then Ned said in the tone of a person who speaks in his sleep:

"If she had been twenty feet nearer we should have been crushed like an egg-shell!"

"And perhaps those on board would hardly have known what had been done. I can't understand why she didn't see our lights."

"I don't suppose they make much of a show on a small craft like this. It was a danger I had never thought about, and now I shall be expecting an accident of that kind until daylight comes once more."

"I don't think we are likely to have more than one such adventure in a night, but if it should come we would be powerless. I've put some coffee on to boil, and think you and I had better have a cup."

"Go and get it; never mind milk or sugar. If we drink it plain it will help to keep our eyes open."

"Not much chance of their closing very soon after that sight," Roy replied mournfully as he carefully made his way below once more

CHAPTER XVII.

IN PORT.

VANCE continued to sleep as soundly as if he had been at home, and Ned said enviously when Roy brought the coffee:

"I wish you an' I were as well off as he. Until he wakes up it won't make any difference to him whether the wind blows a gale or fines down into a calm."

"Would you waken him for the coffee?"

"Not a bit of it; let the poor fellow sleep while he can. I only wish we could join him."

Wishing never did mend matters however, and Ned soon ceased such a very unprofitable occupation.

The hot coffee was really refreshing, and after drinking two cups each, the boys felt almost as if they had been taking a rest.

"It seems to me as if the wind was decreasing," Ned said after a time, and Roy replied:

"I am almost certain of it. I've noticed that the yacht rode easier since we came so near being run down by the steamer."

"And it seems to be hauling around again. If we have many more changes the Zoe will have sailed in a circle before morning."

"I reckon we shall have to take it as it comes," Roy said grimly. "I am more afraid of a calm than of an increase in the wind. It would be terrible to be becalmed where we didn't have the slightest idea of our position."

Ned made no reply.

According to his ideas there were plenty of disagreeable things close at hand, without going into the future to find them.

Not until the clock had marked the hour of three, although it may have been two or four, did Vance awaken, and then, whether the time-piece was correct or not, he knew he had had more than his share of sleep.

"Say, why didn't one of you fellows turn me out?" he asked as he came toward the wheel. "Here I've been taking my ease as if I was a swell passenger, while you two were on duty."

"There was no reason why you shouldn't have slept while it was possible," Roy replied. "There was nothing to be done, even if you had remained awake, and now when one of us feels like taking a nap, you can do your share of the steering."

"How are we getting along?"

"Doing a heap of sailing, but it's an open question whether we are progressing very fast."

"The storm seems to have cleared away."

"Yes, we've got nothing but a fair sailing breeze now, and with the drag of the screw I don't fancy we are more than tossing about on the waves," Ned replied,and then he added to Roy; "Suppose you turn to and get breakfast, old fellow? It's pretty early, I know, but we shall feel the better for something hot in the way of grub. Now that Vance is awake there is nothing to prevent your staying below as long as may be necessary."

The amateur cook acted upon the suggestion at once, and half an hour after he went into the kitchen the sun began to show himself above the horizon.

"Now hunt around the cabin where the sailing master slept for an almanac," Ned said to Vance. "There must be one somewhere aboard."

"What are you going to do with it? See what the weather prophets say about the weather?"

"I want to find out what time the sun rises, so we can set this clock."

Vance hurried away to obey this order, and in a few minutes returned with the desired book, but it looked rather the worse for wear, owing to its having been soaked well in salt water.

After some difficulty Ned succeeded in gaining the information required, and to his surprise it was found that they had guessed within twenty minutes of the true time, or as nearly as could be judged from the coming of the day.

The hands of the clock were moved forward to where Ned thought they belonged, and then he looked round the horizon, now that it was sufficiently light to see surrounding objects, if indeed there were any.

At first glance it appeared as if they were alone upon the ocean.

Not a sail could be seen in either direction, and Vance announced that there was no land in sight, when Ned exclaimed as he pointed about four points to the southward of the course they were then heading:

"Look over there! What do you make that to be?"

Vance gazed earnestly in the direction indicated, and after a long scrutiny replied in a careless tone:

"Nothing but a cloud."

"It's land! There's no question about it. Call Roy, will you?"

"What's that for?"

"We'll see what he thinks about trying to make it. It is not in the direction where we expected to

see anything of the kind, but it strikes me we should do our best to reach it, if for no other purpose than to find out where we are."

Roy was soon in the pilot-house, and after looking at what to an inexperienced eye appeared nothing more than a cloud, as Vance had suggested, he decided Ned was correct.

"What do you think of trying to make it?"

"Can you do so with this wind?"

"Yes, by trimmin' the sails properly, an' it seems as if we ought to be able to do that."

"Go ahead, then, so far as I 'm concerned. If it is an island of any kind we shan't be worse off than we are now, and in case of its being inhabited our troubles will be at an end, for most likely we can get some one to take us to Key West."

"You may keep on with your cooking. I reckon Vance and I can attend to this matter," Ned replied as he whirled the wheel around until the steamer was headed for the apparent cloud.

Then, stationing Vance at the helm and directing him to keep her on that course as near as possible, the amateur captain went on deck to trim the sails.

This was not a difficult matter, and after some few experiments Ned learned that there was very little difference between sailing a steamer on the ocean and a small boat on the pond in Maine.

"She's got a free wind now, and so long as that holds we won't have any trouble in keeping her headed as we want to go," he said cheerily, for the fact that the little craft behaved much as any other vessel raised his spirits wonderfully.

"It will take us a month to get there, though," Vance said ruefully.

"Nonsense! If the wind don't die away entirely I reckon we shall be able to see what that land looks like before the sun sets again. The screw won't drag so much now that she heels over considerably, an' we'll make good headway."

The weight of the breeze had forced the yacht over to an angle of perhaps thirty degrees, and although it was rather more difficult to keep her true to the course, she behaved very well.

Roy was preparing for a more sociable meal than had yet been served, as was learned a few moments later when he came to the pilot-house to call Vance.

"I'm going to bring the grub up here so we can eat together," he said, "therefore you must help me. After breakfast I'll try and clean up below, for if we reach port there's no reason why we should look so slovenly."

"Something should be done with the treasure before any strangers come aboard," Vance added, thinking of the wealth in the cabin for almost the

first time since the previous night shut down upon them so forbiddingly. "Where can we put it?"

"In the hold, well aft, an' throw a lot of rope and canvas over it," Ned replied promptly. "No one will fancy we've got treasure aboard."

This satisfied Vance, more particularly since his companions proposed that he take full charge of the gold and silver, and ten minutes later a most appetizing breakfast was spread on the wheel-house locker.

With the assistance of his companions in the way of passing him the food, Ned was able to eat at the same time he performed his duties as helmsman, and the spirits of the little crew revived wonderfully when the meal had been concluded.

Ned was left alone while the other two went below, Roy to put things to rights generally, and Vance to hide the treasure in anticipation of visitors.

It seemed very much as if this particular breeze had come to stay until the yacht should reach port.

It no longer shifted so often, but held steadily from the same point, and with sufficient force to send the Zoe along at quite a respectable rate of speed.

As might have been expected, the waves still ran very high, but the little craft was showing herself to be a good sea-boat, even though disabled, and each instant the apparent cloud took on more the semblance of land.

Vance was the first to complete his work below, and he entered the wheel-house shortly before noon, saying as he did so:

"I reckon the money is safe. I've hidden it where no one would ever think of looking, unless they were certain we had something of the kind on board. Say! but that land shows up now, don't it?"

"There's no longer any question about soon having all the assistance we need," Ned replied cheerily. "Anything as large as that, even if it is only an island, must be inhabited."

"I hope we shall be able to telegraph to father, for he must be worrying about us by this time."

"You won't have any trouble on that score. Take the wheel awhile, and I'll see if I can't trim the sails a little better. It looks to me as if we might get more speed out of the yacht."

Ned was correct in this belief, for after the canvas had been drawn in a trifle more, it could readily be seen that she moved through the water

considerably faster, and the "bone in her teeth" was as large as one could have desired.

The sea was rapidly subsiding. The little craft no longer flung the water over her decks, but sent it swirling aft on either side in proper fashion.

In the cabin, pantry, and kitchen Roy was doing wonders in the cleaning line, and the Zoe was rapidly being gotten into shape for inspection.

"I'll get dinner as soon as this is finished," the amateur cook said after Ned had praised him for the altered appearance of the craft. "If you can spare Vance awhile it will help things along just so much."

Once more Ned stood at the wheel alone; but the chances of reaching port very soon seemed so good that he was perfectly willing to remain there until it should be possible to come to an anchor.

The sun was yet above the horizon when, after a voyage which had been made at the caprice of the wind and tides, the Zoe entered a roadstead wherein were craft of every description.

"What city do you suppose this can be?" Roy asked in perplexity as the three stood in the wheelhouse, where they had been every moment since the land could be distinctly seen.

It was a question which each member of the

party had already asked half a dozen times, and no one paid any particular attention to it.

It was sufficient for all that they had arrived at some place where an engineer and sailing master could probably be hired.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HAVANA.

The yacht was run in as far toward the piers as the wind would permit and then the anchor was let go.

It seemed as if this had but just been done when a boat rowed by four sailors, with a man in uniform at the helm, pulled out to the Zoe.

"It begins to look as if we'd soon find out what port this is," Ned said as he noticed this craft. "Those fellows are comin' out most likely to learn who we are, and I reckon they know where they live."

Just at that moment almost any visitor would have been welcome because of the information he could impart, and the amateur crew were ready to receive the officer when he came alongside.

He hailed them in a foreign tongue, and Ned, acting as the captain, replied in English:

"I'm blessed if I know what you are sayin'. This is the steam-yacht Zoe, disabled, and in here for repairs.'

The visitor could speak English, as was soon learned when he came over the rail, saying as he did so:

"Where is the captain?"

"I suppose I'm in charge," Ned replied. "This craft was chartered by the fathers of my companions to be used at their winter home in Florida. The crew were washed overboard during a gale and the steamer nearly wrecked. We managed to get her off and have come in here under sail. Will you kindly tell me where we are?"

"This is the port of Havana."

"And we are in Cuba!" Vance cried as if in alarm.

"That is not so very far from home," the officer replied with a smile. "A sail of less than a hundred miles will bring you to Key West."

Then he questioned them further regarding the craft, and on taking his departure promised to send the boys an interpreter.

"Do not pay him more than $2 a day, and if, while making your repairs, there should be any dispute arise, come directly to me. I shall be pleased to render you all the assistance in my power."

"If the man whom you send can bring us a boat at a reasonable price it will be a favor," Ned said. "All our tenders have been carried away."

"I will see that it is done," the man replied, and then, with many expressions of friendliness, the official took his departure.

"Ain't you goin' it a little strong when you talk of buying a boat?" Vance asked.

"We've got to have one, otherwise how will it be possible to go ashore?"

"But what about money to pay for it?"

"I reckon what we took out of the hulk will see us through."

"Are you counting on using that?" Vance asked in surprise.

"What else can we do? The machinery must be put in working order, we are bound to hire a crew, and we've got to have the interpreter which the officer is goin' to send. All that can't be accomplished without funds, and I see no reason why we shouldn't dip into the hoard which some very jolly fellow must have stowed away for our especial benefit."

"Of course we shall use it," Roy added. "It would be ridiculous to suffer for anything when we have sufficient means in the hold to buy even a new craft if it should become necessary."

Roy understood that he must do as his companions wished, but at the same time it seemed almost a sacrilege to use the treasure. As a matter of fact

he had become almost a miser since the discovery of the wealth, and it pained him to think of spending so much as a single coin.

It was necessary to draw on the hoard for funds, and since this should be done while they were alone, Vance went below to attend to that very important task.

He returned with about a hundred Mexican dollars and half that number of gold-pieces, the value of which none of the party knew.

"I think your first work should be to go on shore with the interpreter to have this money changed," Ned said when Vance had found a bag in which to deposit the coin. "There must be plenty of places here where you can sell it, and we ought to know the value of it."

"I'll do that, and afterward send machinists on board to see in what condition the engine is. We can engage a crew the day before we are ready to leave."

Vance was eager to make one of the shore party, and Ned insisted that there was no reason why he should not go.

"There is nothing to be done here," he said, "an' I reckon one is enough to attend to the loafin'; but if that fellow don't come pretty soon there'll be no goin' ashore for any of us. It will be dark in an

hour, an' you want daylight for it if you're thinkin' of buyin' anything."

Ned had hardly ceased speaking when the interpreter came alongside in an apparently new boat, this last fact being sufficient to explain to the boys who he was.

Judging from his face one would have said he was a Cuban; but he spoke English so well that it seemed certain he must have been born in the United States.

He presented himself very politely, almost too much so, Ned thought, and although not one of the party could have told the reason why, all felt a certain distrust of the man.

He explained that the officer of the port, probably meaning a sort of harbor master, sent him, and that the official had said that his wages were to be two American dollars per day.

The boat, he said, was cheap at $30, but he had only brought it out on approval, consequently they were at liberty to return it if not satisfactory.

"We will talk about that when we come back," Roy said curtly. "Just now it is necessary to go on shore at once. We have some Mexican money which we want to turn into such coins as pass current here."

As he spoke Roy took one of the gold pieces from the bag and showed it to the man.

"It is very old," the latter said as he examined the coin intently. "Have you just come from Mexico?"

"No, indeed, we were wrecked on one of the keys, we don't know where, and this was the first port we made."

Ned believed the man was giving more attention to the gold-piece than would have been natural had his curiosity been excited simply because it was very old.

He turned it over and over, glanced furtively around the yacht as if expecting to see something which might be connected with the money, and then said:

"This looks as if it had been under water some time."

"I don't see why," Roy said quickly. "If exposed for any length of time to the action of salt water gold will turn very dark, whereas this is as bright as could be expected if it had been in circulation many years."

"And yet it has not been used for a very long while—perhaps a hundred years."

"How do you make that out?" Vance asked quickly.

"Because of its age. I should think a collector

of old coins would like to purchase such pieces of money."

"We haven't the time to hunt for that class of people. Just now we need money to pay for what it is necessary to purchase, and unless we go ashore pretty soon it will be too late to do anything until to-morrow."

"It is believed there is a great deal of piratical gold hidden on the keys near here," the interpreter said as he gave back the coin.

"But that can't be any of it," Vance replied quickly, "for——"

Roy prevented anything more being said by stepping on his friend's foot at that instant, and this time Ned fancied he saw an odd expression come over the man's face.

He said nothing, however, but went toward the rail as if ready to embark, and in a few moments the three were pulling rapidly toward the nearest pier.

"We shan't be gone more than an hour," Roy cried as they left the yacht, "and when we come back the boat shall be half-loaded with fruit. This is a good place in which to buy such things."

"Take your time. I'm all right here, an' will see to it that nobody comes on board while you are away."

Ned watched until the little boat touched the dock, and then muttered to himself as he examined the hawsers to make certain they were holding:

"I'll own up to bein' a Dutchman if that fellow don't try to find out more about the gold before we lose sight of him. I didn't like his face for a cent. He is one of that kind of fellows who wouldn't hesitate about putting a knife into a man's back, an' I think will bear watching."

After ascertaining that everything on deck was in proper order, Ned went into the wheel-house to watch for the return of his friends, and when they had been absent about an hour his attention was drawn to a small boat, containing two men, which was being rowed around and around the yacht as if to make a general inspection.

"I hope they'll know the Zoe when they see her again," he said to himself as he watched the movements of the craft, and then it seemed to him as if these inquisitive strangers must have some connection with the interpreter.

"I'm makin' a fool of myself," he said with a laugh as the boat was finally headed for the shore. "Just because I don't like the man's face I'm givin' him the credit of bein' a tough case, when most likely he's a poor duffer who has never a thought of

more than earning $2 a day by acting as interpreter for sea captains who can't speak Spanish. It won't do any harm to make preparations for trouble, though, even if there is precious little chance we shall ever have any."

Half an hour later the party returned, evidently in the best of spirits.

Roy had kept his word in regard to buying fruit, and had brought off enough of all kinds to be found in the market, to provide for their wants during the next week.

"Did you have any trouble in exchanging the money," Ned asked in a low tone as Roy came over the rail.

"None whatever. The broker seemed surprised to see the pieces, however, and he and the interpreter talked for a long while in Spanish. The machinists will come aboard bright and early to-morrow, and Manuel thinks he can find a competent engineer for us at a moment's notice."

"Who's Manuel?"

"The interpreter, of course."

"Say, Roy, give me about $30, will you?"

"It's more yours than mine, so take as much as you want," and Roy pulled from his pocket a handful of money. "What are you going to do with it?"

"I'll show you when I come back. I'm thinking of getting Manuel to go ashore with me."

"All right. Don't stay too long, for we're bound to have a swell supper to-night."

"I shan't be away more than half an hour," Ned replied, and then he asked the interpreter if he would take him for a short trip.

Manuel professed to be not only willing, but pleased to grant the favor, and as soon as the purchases of fruit and provisions could be taken from the boat, the two rowed toward the pier from which she had just come.

CHAPTER XIX.

SUSPICIONS.

Not until they were ashore did Ned tell Manuel the nature of his errand, and then he said with an assumption of carelessness:

"Take me where I can buy a revolver."

"A revolver?" the man repeated as if in surprise.

"Certainly. Is there anything to prevent?"

"Nothing, of course, only it seemed strange in the first place that there should not be an ample supply of weapons on the steamer, and then again that you might think a revolver necessary so soon after arriving at one of the most peaceable ports in the world."

"The yacht is only chartered, and her armory belongs to her owners," Ned replied, not intending to let the interpreter know there was nothing of the kind on board. "Besides, there are likely to be bad people in any city, and while I don't look for any trouble, it is better to be prepared."

Again he fancied the man had a peculiar expression on his face; but he made no delay in leading

Ned to a gunsmith's, where two Colt's revolvers, with a small amount of ammunition, were purchased.

Then he proposed that they return to the yacht at once, and as the boat was rowed alongside, said when he had laid his bundle on the rail:

"Wait there a minute, and I'll see what remains to be done this evening."

With the weapons under his arm, for he did not intend to give any one a chance to tamper with them, he went directly to the kitchen, where he knew Roy would be engaged in making preparations for supper.

"Got back, have you?" the latter asked carelessly.

"Yes. Do you need the interpreter any more to-night?"

"Why, I thought it would be a good idea to have him sleep on board, and then in case any one came out from the shore we should be able to talk with them."

"Did you say anything to him about it?"

"No, for I only thought of the plan since you went ashore."

"Then let me send him away. I think we shall be safer alone."

"Why, do you think——"

"I'll explain the reason for taking so many precautions after Manuel leaves," Ned replied as he hurried on deck, and then said as he leaned over the rail where he could speak with the man; "There is nothing more to be done. Will you please get here in the morning as soon as the workmen come? for we can't tell them what is wanted unless you are on hand."

"Am I not to remain on board the yacht? It is customary."

"In this case it will be best not to do anything of the kind. We have no cook, and each fellow waits upon himself."

"I should be willing to do the same."

"We would rather you stayed on shore," Ned replied, and this time he spoke so decidedly that the interpreter could do no less than take his departure.

Ned repeated the conversation to his friends, both of whom were in the kitchen, when he went below, and Roy asked curiously:

"Why is it you were opposed to his staying on board? I think it might be rather nice, for he could tell us all about the city and would be on hand when the machinists arrive."

"I don't think it is safe," was the emphatic reply, which caused his companions to stare at him in surprise.

"Where can be the harm?"

"I don't know as there would be any; but it surely can't be wrong to take precautions, even though some of them may be foolish. I noticed a queer look on that fellow's face when you showed him the gold, and you must remember that he talked about piratical treasure as if he expected you to tell him where we got what you sold. Now look at the matter squarely: You carry on shore, after saying we were wrecked on a key, a lot of old coins such as have been found around here. It isn't likely you would have taken such money from home, consequently every person who sees it must at once come to the correct conclusion. That being the case, don't you think there would be people enough in this city who would risk an encounter with three boys for the sake of learning whether there were any more of those ancient gold-pieces on board?"

"You're right!" Roy exclaimed, a startled look coming into his eyes, and Vance added:

"How do we know but that the interpreter or his friends wouldn't attempt the job?"

"That was exactly why I didn't want him on board at night, and the reason of my buying these," Ned replied as he opened the package, exposing the weapons to view. "I propose that we keep our

eyes open pretty wide, not only while we remain in port, but until we can put the treasure in a safer place. This yacht and her cargo would be such a prize as might tempt very many men to turn pirates for the time being."

"You've got a mighty level head," Vance added approvingly, "and I say as I did when we were on the key, that we will recognize you as the skipper of this craft."

Roy also believed there were good grounds for Ned's suspicions, and for the first time since reaching port, both he and Vance were seriously disturbed in mind.

"There is no reason why you should fuss about the matter," Ned hastened to say as he saw what sort of an effect his words had upon his companions. "It's only a case of standing watch all the time, and that won't be such very hard work between three."

When a satisfactory supper had been eaten the boys sat on the deck aft, where the lights of the city could best be seen, and there all three remained until nine o'clock, when Ned proposed that the night watch be set.

"We'll take it an hour apiece, and draw lots to see who begins. At the first thing which looks suspicious, or can't be explained readily, the others are

to be awakened. It will be better to turn all hands out on a false alarm than run any risk."

Vance held three splinters of wood in his hands, and it was understood that he who got the longest should begin the work of watching.

By this arrangement Roy was to stand the first trick, to be followed by Ned and Vance in the order named, and, with one of the revolvers loaded ready for use, the former began to pace to and fro on the deck.

The clock had been brought from the wheel-house and hung in the after cabin, where a lamp was to be burning, in order that the sentinel might see when his time of duty expired.

Roy and Vance retired, and, worn out by their previous exertions, were soon asleep.

Although the watch was maintained regularly and each boy attended strictly to "business," nothing of a suspicious nature was seen, and Roy began to think that perhaps Ned was a trifle too cautious.

At seven o'clock two machinists, accompanied by the interpreter, came on board, and Roy explained what was to be done.

He was not certain whether the engine had received any damage by its submersion, but asked that it be thoroughly overhauled and put into running order in the shortest possible space of time.

Manuel repeated these instructions, and the men went to work while Roy and Vance prepared breakfast, in which the interpreter was invited to join after it had been spread in the tiny forward cabin.

During the meal Manuel inquired particularly concerning the plans of the boys, regarding the port which they intended to make, who would be there to meet them, and, in fact, so many things that did not concern him as to cause Ned's suspicions to grow stronger.

"Suppose you try to telegraph to your parents?" the latter suggested when the meal was concluded, and while speaking he kept his eyes fastened on the interpreter's face.

It may have been only imagination on his part, but he really believed Manuel looked disappointed because such a thing was thought necessary.

"Can we do it from here?" Vance asked eagerly, and the interpreter shook his head.

"I do not think so," he replied promptly. "There is a cable, but it has not been working. I can take a letter to the purser of the next steamer which sails for New York. He is a friend of mine and will see that it is forwarded without delay."

"When does she sail?"

"To-morrow."

"Then we will get one ready to-day, and perhaps

our fathers will receive the news almost as quickly as if it was possible to send a telegram," Roy replied in a tone of satisfaction as he arose from the table.

Manuel went on deck to smoke his cigar, and when he was gone Ned called his friends into the kitchen.

"I am goin' ashore to find out if that yarn about the cable is true. Write out such a message as you want sent, an' we'll soon know whether Manuel is to be trusted or not."

"You are too suspicious," Roy said just a trifle impatiently, and Vance added quickly:

"I don't think so. It won't do any harm if we take too many precautions, and it may mean a good deal to miss an opportunity of knowing just what is going on."

"But what benefit would it be to the man, even if he has an idea the yacht can be captured, to prevent us from sending a telegram?"

"Because," Ned replied quickly, "there would be less chance thieves could be tracked if your parents had received no word from you since the Zoe left Key West."

"But he promises to send a letter."

"And you will have no means of knowing whether he does so or not. At all events, don't write a line or even a word about the treasure."

"I think you had better try your luck on shore," Vance said decidedly. "I'll write a telegram if Roy don't care to, and there won't be any damage done if you can't send it."

"You do that and I'll attend to the letter," Roy replied. "But how can Ned learn anything about the cable while he doesn't understand the language?"

"I'll guarantee to find some one who'll help me along," the boy replied confidently, and just then the return of Manuel interrupted the conversation.

"The machinists wish to speak with one of you," he said.

"You go, Roy, while I look out for some business which must be attended to," Vance replied as he began to write the telegram.

The two left the cabin, and as soon as the message was finished Ned put it in his pocket.

Then, while the interpreter was in the engine-room, he got into the boat and pulled ashore.

The machinists wanted to report progress, and Roy was surprised at seeing that they had already raised steam.

"They say it is all right now, except that it needs cleaning," Manuel said after listening to one of the men a moment. "They have repaired the damage, and there is nothing to prevent your leaving by noon."

"That is just what we will do!" Roy exclaimed, without thinking it necessary to consult his companions. "Can you get us a sailing master, engineer, and steward by that time?"

"I am certain of it," the interpreter replied. "I had already seen two of the men, and it will not be difficult to find the third."

"Then set about it as soon as possible. There is no reason why we should lay here a moment longer than necessary, and by starting now we can be at Key West before morning."

"Do you need any stores?" Manuel asked.

"We have enough of everything to last us into that port. Don't delay in getting the crew."

As a matter of course when Manuel came on deck he failed to find the tender; but a passing craft responded to his hail, and he was set ashore within five minutes after Ned landed.

An hour later he returned with two Cubans and a negro, the latter being, according to his own account, a first-class cook.

The man who was presented as the sailing master was received by Roy and put in command at once, with instructions to be ready to get under way as soon as Ned returned.

He was not a particularly prepossessing looking man, but had the air of a sailor and was so highly

recommended by Manuel that Roy thought he was very fortunate indeed in being able to hire such a master.

The engineer set about helping the machinists as if thoroughly well acquainted with his duties, and the negro began to wash the dishes, an action which endeared him at once to Roy's heart, for of all the work connected with the kitchen this last was the most disagreeable.

"Do you think it was just fair to engage these people and set them to work before Ned came back?" Vance asked as soon as it was possible to speak with his friend where they would not be overheard.

"Why not?"

"Because we both agreed he should be the boss of the steamer."

"What nonsense! We shall gain so much time, and the instant he steps aboard we will start out of the harbor. Come with me while we pay the interpreter, and then he can hail another boat to take him ashore."

"The one he brought the men in is still alongside."

"So much the better, for he can go at once," and Roy went on deck, intent only on being under way at the earliest possible moment.

Manuel was talking very earnestly with the sailing master, but he stopped instantly he saw the boys and asked if there was anything more he could do.

"I think not," Roy replied, "and there is no reason why you shouldn't go ashore as soon as you please."

"But since you can't speak the language how will it be possible to tell the crew what you want done?"

"I never thought of that," Roy replied in perplexity. "It might come unhandy."

"You are right. Now, I have a proposition which you will do well to accept. This gentleman agrees to put the yacht into Key West for $15; the engineer wants $10 and the cook $8, they getting back here as best they can. Why not give me a ten-dollar bill for the services already performed and what I may be called upon for until the steamer is in the home port?"

"What do you think of it?" Roy asked, turning to Vance.

"I've got nothing to say," the latter replied. "I don't think it is the square thing to make these trades without at least consulting Ned."

This remark piqued Roy, and he replied to the interpreter:

"All right, you shall go. Find out how much the machinists charge for their services and we will send them ashore at once. I suppose the engineer can finish the job of cleaning up?"

"Certainly," Manuel said as he went into the engine-room, and a few moments later he came on deck with the workmen.

Their bill was $2, and this seemed so very reasonable as compared with some bills he had seen his father pay that Roy added a dollar to the amount.

"Tell them to go ashore," he said to the interpreter. "I suppose they can use the boat you came out in?"

"Of course. It is my only chance to send her back."

"Now ask the engineer to get steam on," Roy said when the men had disappeared over the side.

"Will your friend be back soon?" Manuel inquired.

"I am expecting him every moment, and as soon as he steps aboard you may tell the captain to get under way."

Manuel repeated this order at once, and the sailing master, after speaking a few words to the engineer, did not disdain to work the capstan himself, hauling the little craft directly over the anchor.

The black smoke which came from the stack, together with the soft murmur of escaping steam, told that the Zoe could be on her way out of the harbor in less than three minutes from the time the word to start was given.

Vance was thoroughly displeased that Roy should have thus taken the management of matters so wholly into his own hands.

He fancied that both the sailing master and the interpreter looked very well satisfied after it was decided the latter should accompany the yacht, and felt quite confident they exchanged triumphant glances when the word was given to be ready to leave the instant Ned came aboard.

Unfortunately, however, he did not remonstrate with Roy, as he should have done, but went aft and remained there alone, watching for Ned.

The most suspicious person could have found nothing in the actions of the crew to warrant any fears on the score of foul play.

The steward and the engineer appeared to be intent only upon their duties, and the captain had already shown that he was willing to turn his hand to anything which could forward the wishes of his employers.

Not until nearly an hour after the machinists had gone ashore did Ned put out from the dock, and

when he came alongside Manuel stood ready to catch the painter.

Ned gazed with surprise at the captain and steward, both of whom chanced to be on deck, and then, beckoning to Roy, who was in the wheel-house, went below.

"Well?" the latter asked as he followed the new-comer.

"I found the telegraph office, and there hasn't been any trouble with the cable for the past year. The interpreter has lied to us, and he must have some reason for so doing."

CHAPTER XX.

AN ILL-ADVISED START.

VANCE hastened to the forward cabin as soon as he saw Ned go down the companion-way, and arrived there just in time to hear the last portion of his remark.

Roy seemed thoroughly bewildered on thus learning that the interpreter had deceived them, and stood silent and motionless as Vance said bitterly :

"With such a man to manage the job, it isn't hard to fancy that they'll make a pretty thorough search of this craft before leaving her."

"The best thing we can do is to send him ashore at once," Ned added. "We don't want such fellows around, for it isn't safe."

"But Roy has already hired a sailing master and a steward. In addition to that, he has engaged Manuel to go with us to Key West."

Ned looked at Roy as if asking if the statement was correct.

"I didn't think there would be any harm in making ready to leave as soon as possible, for the machinists reported that the engine had been repaired, and by leaving now we can be in Key West before morning."

"But you surely are not willing to take a crew selected by Manuel after what I have told you?" Ned said in surprise.

"When I engaged them I didn't know there was anything wrong."

"But now that— What is going on? It sounds as if we were under way!"

Ned ran hastily up the companion stairs, looked around for an instant, and then leaped below in the greatest excitement as he said hurriedly:

"It is a fact! We are steaming out of the harbor! What is the meaning of it?"

"I told them to start the minute you came on board," Roy said in a low tone, wishing from the very bottom of his heart that he had never given such an order.

"And we are are going to run across with four men on board who are perfect strangers, except that we know one told an absolute lie for the purpose of preventing you from sending any word to your parents!" Ned exclaimed as he literally threw himself into a chair and stared moodily at the floor.

"I wasn't consulted in the matter at all," Vance said angrily. "I told Roy I thought he should wait till you came aboard."

"I surely asked your opinion about taking Manuel as interpreter," Roy said sharply.

"Yes; but that was after you had made the trade with the others, and they virtually had possession of the yacht."

"Well, it can't be helped now, and we must decide what may be done to prevent them from taking us by surprise," Ned said with a long-drawn sigh.

He fancied he knew exactly how Roy felt when he made the bargain, and that it had only been done from a desire to be with his parents as soon as possible, therefore it did not seem to him right that the boy should be blamed.

"Why can't it be helped?" Vance cried sharply. "What is to prevent us from ordering them to put back?"

"If they have come on board with any idea of taking possession of the steamer, they wouldn't obey the command and we should only succeed in starting a row before being prepared."

"I'll soon know what they mean!" Roy said angrily as he went toward the companion-way.

"Wait a minute!" Ned cried as he caught him by the arm. "Don't act as hastily as you did be-

fore, but think the matter over first. Suppose they refuse to obey orders, what can we do before mapping out a plan?"

"I'll take one of the revolvers with me and make them do as I say."

"And probably be knocked down before you had spoken half a dozen words, even though the men were perfectly honest. Who do you suppose would allow a boy to come at him with a drawn weapon without making some kind of a row?"

It did not take many moments for Roy to realize the truth of this, and he seated himself on one of the lockers in moody silence.

"Well, see here, this won't do," Vance suddenly cried. "The yacht is getting further out of the harbor every moment, and if there is such an idea as turning back, it should be carried into effect at once."

"I don't know what to say," Roy replied in dismay.

"And I think it would be foolish to attempt to change any of the orders which have been given," Ned added. "If the men are bent on mischief they wouldn't obey, and if they are honest we shall get to Key West without trouble."

"Well, are you going to sit here and let matters take their own course?" Vance asked impatiently.

"This is what I think might be done," Ned replied, speaking slowly, as if weighing well his words. "One of us could sit in the pilot-house and the other in the engine-room all the time, each armed with a revolver. The third would spell either when it became necessary, and thus a watch might be kept over the two most important sections of the craft."

"But suppose they should raise a row because we remained on guard?" Vance asked.

"If they are perfectly honest nothing of the kind could happen, and if not, the question will surely arise, when we can speak right out and say exactly why we don't like the looks of things. Men who have come aboard simply to earn their wages by performing the necessary work surely wouldn't object to those who stand in the place of the owners caring for the property."

"What do you think of that plan, Roy?" Vance asked.

"I'll go in for anything you two believe best. After being so smart I ought to be willing to tie my head in a bag until we reach port."

"But you haven't made any provision for keeping an eye on the hold," Vance suggested in a whisper.

"Why can't you do that? I'll go into the pilot-house, Roy into the engine-room, and you would be

at liberty to prowl around anywhere. It won't be a very long watch if they intend to play square."

"Then let's begin at once."

All hands arose to their feet and ascended the companion-way, since it was necessary first to go on deck in order to reach either of the places referred to.

Manuel was standing just beneath the wheel-house when the boys reached the open air, and it looked very much as if he had been hovering around the hatch-way in the hope of overhearing what might be said in the forward cabin, where the consultation was held.

"We are under way," he said to Roy, treating him as the leader of the party, as was but natural, since by him he and his friends had been put in possession of the little craft.

"So I see. We should arrive some time during the night, for this craft can make twelve knots under ordinary circumstances."

"If the weather holds good you will awaken in port," was the reply. "The captain has been to Key West many times, and will get the little steamer there as soon as any other person could."

"How about the engineer?" Vance asked.

"Oh, he is a master of his trade; you need have no fears but that she will be kept at full speed."

"I think I'll have a look at him," Roy said, and as he started aft followed by Manuel, Ned suddenly remembered that after deciding upon their course of action they had been so careless as to forget the weapons, which were in one of the after-cabin lockers.

"Hold on a minute!" he said quickly. "I wish you would show me where those papers were put."

"What papers?" Roy asked innocently, and the most careless observer would have understood that there was nothing of the kind aboard.

"The ones I gave you just before I went on shore," and by dint of much winking, which may or may not have been seen by the interpreter, Roy finally understood that he should accompany his friends.

"Well, of all thick-headed mortals you are the worst!" Vance whispered when they were in the after cabin. "It was necessary for Ned to give the whole snap away before you could understand that he wanted to speak with you."

"I'll admit that I'm about as stupid as fellows are usually made," Roy replied seriously, "and the knowledge of what I have possibly done only makes me worse. What is it you wanted, Ned?"

"We forgot the revolvers, like a set of chumps, and they are here," Ned replied as he opened the locker.

The words had hardly been spoken, and before the weapons could be raised, when the companion-way doors were suddenly pulled to, the hatch drawn over, while the click of metal told that the bolts had been drawn.

Vance was at the top of the stairs instantly pounding on the wood-work, but no attention was paid to him for several moments.

"Unlock this door!" he shouted. "What do you mean by shutting us in here?"

The party on the outside appeared to be making the fastenings secure, and not until this had been done to his satisfaction did he condescend to reply; then the prisoners heard the voice of Manuel as he said loudly:

"We have taken a notion to learn where those old coins come from and think you may have a good supply on board, consequently found it necessary to take possession. It won't do any good to shout and rave, for we are well out of the harbor. So try to make the best of a bad matter."

Ned took careful aim in the direction of the voice and discharged one barrel of his revolver, the bullet plowing its way through the thin barrier; but, so far as could be ascertained, doing no further damage.

"I'll soon show you how to do that sort of thing,

my bantam," Manuel replied angrily, and then the sound of his footsteps on the roof of the cabin told that he had gone forward.

"It is just as I feared," Ned said with a sigh. "That fellow had all the opportunity he needed and has taken advantage of it. The sight of the money told him almost as plainly as words could have done that we had found a treasure on the key where the yacht went ashore."

"And I was such a fool as to arrange everything for them in the best possible shape!" Roy moaned. "It doesn't seem as if a fellow *could* make such a fool of himself as I have succeeded in doing."

"It's no use crying over what can't be helped," Ned said cheerily as he mentally braced himself to appear cheerful lest his companions should lose all courage. "We must try to get the best of those fellows."

"And we stand a mighty good chance, don't we? Four of them against three who are locked into a place where they not only can't help themselves, but are shut out from every other portion of the steamer!" Vance said bitterly. "Now they are convinced there is treasure on board, it won't take more than ten minutes to discover it, and most likely the yacht is being headed this very minute where they can trust to finding friends."

NED SHOOTS AT MANUEL THROUGH THE CABIN SKYLIGHT.—Page 251.

"I don't fancy she is bound for Key West," Ned replied, "but I can't see why it is necessary to look for friends, since they have got things all their own way, while we're shut up here like rats in a trap."

Then came a long interval of silence as each fellow was trying in vain to devise some scheme by which the recapture of the yacht would be possible, and all were startled as if by an electric shock when a loud report rang out, followed by the splintering of wood and glass, as a bullet lodged in the panels of the state-room door within a few inches of Ned's head.

For an instant the three stood as if panic-stricken, and then Vance ran toward the bulkhead which divided the cabin from a portion of the engine-room as he cried:

"Get up here, quick! He's trying for another shot!"

As he spoke he pointed to the skylight, from which direction the bullet had come, and there could be seen the interpreter's legs as he was gliding noiselessly around in the hope of seeing his intended victims more clearly.

This was just the opportunity Ned wanted, and, resting his revolver on his arm in order to take more steady aim, fired twice in rapid succession.

A scream of pain told that at least one of the missiles had struck the target, and the oaths and imprecations which followed gave very good evidence as to who had been wounded.

"You shall pay for this, you scoundrels!" Manuel cried in a fury. "Don't think that because you are hidden from view it is impossible to get at you. There is no need of our hunting you out; a few days with neither food nor water will soon do the business!"

"But what is to prevent our winging all hands of your party before we're starved?" Ned cried. "We are justified in shooting to kill, for you have shown yourselves to be pirates, and we shan't give in without a struggle. Watch your chance!" he added in a whisper to Roy. "We've got to shoot them down or else go under ourselves."

"You won't crow so loud to-morrow," Manuel shouted, and then the sound of halting footsteps told that he had gone forward once more.

"You are shivering like a fellow with a chill," Vance said to Roy.

"So would you if you had gotten us into the scrape that I have. It seems as if I had doomed all three to death."

"You mustn't give way like that," Ned said sharply, "or there will be very little hope for us.

Vance, you take the revolver until Roy pulls himself together, for just now I don't believe he could hit the side of a barn."

"Is this all we are to do—stand here for them to sneak up and shoot us whenever they feel like it?" Vance asked as he obeyed the order.

"Not by any manner of means, an' it won't pay to remain in this spot very long, for they can fire at us from the engine-room. I'll go into one of the state-rooms, and you take the other. By leaving the doors open it will be possible to keep watch on the skylights, and that is the most dangerous point just now."

Vance made his way quickly into the room on the starboard side, fastening the door open with a chair lest the motion of the craft should close it, and Ned went into the apartment opposite, Roy following him.

Not until this had been done was it learned that the stock of cartridges was yet in the locker, and it was necessary they be divided before Manuel should have attended to his wound and returned to watch for a chance to shoot one of the prisoners.

Ned darted out very swiftly, knowing he stood a poor show of returning if one of the pirates caught a glimpse of him, and in a very short time both the watchers were well supplied with ammunition.

There was no encouragement to be gained from the fact that they were well armed and sheltered from view, as all three realized after they had had time to think the matter over.

The men could easily find the gold and silver, run the yacht into some harbor, and there abandon her, or, making preparations to leave in the small boat at the proper moment, scuttle her.

It was more than probable they would pursue this last course, as Ned admitted to himself after studying the matter several moments, and he could not repress a shudder as he thought that even now they might be arranging such a plan.

The yacht need not be taken more than a dozen miles from the island of Cuba before the deed could be done with but slight chance of detection, and the treasure in the hold was sufficient to tempt such men as they undoubtedly were to commit even a greater crime in order to gain possession of it.

The watchers were sitting on the floor with their backs against the bunks, where they could have a full view of the skylight, and each held his revolver in his hand ready for immediate use.

"There's precious little hope that either of you will get a chance to shoot," Roy said after a long time of silence, during which he had remained with his face buried in his hands. "They are not obliged

to come aft for everything, and even if it should be necessary, it could be done after dark when we can't see them."

"I'm a Dutchman if there isn't one thing in our favor!" Ned cried as a sudden thought occurred to him.

"What is that?" Roy and Vance asked in concert.

"The boat is being towed behind. They have got to come around here before they can abandon the yacht."

"There's no chance of that being done unless——"

Vance ceased speaking very suddenly as he understood what Ned had been thinking about, and to him the future, not very bright before, suddenly grew yet more dark.

Then came another time of silence, during which the motion of the screw suddenly ceased, and the prisoners looked at each other in surprise and alarm.

Was this stoppage due to the engine itself, or had the pirates arrived at that point where they were ready to adopt yet bolder tactics than before?

As a matter of course this question could not be answered among themselves, and they waited in painful suspense for some noise by which they might gain an inkling of the true state of affairs.

CHAPTER XXI.

PRISONERS.

To the great relief of the prisoners the throbbing of the engine was heard a few moments later, and there was no longer any question but that the momentary stoppage had been caused by some trifling defect in the machinery, which could only be remedied by slowing down.

The alarm which the boys felt at the yacht's suddenly becoming motionless on the waters served a far different purpose than the pirates could have suspected.

It suggested to Ned's mind a way of overcoming those who had taken possession of the steamer, and that without taking too many risks of being killed.

Instantly the engine was started again he leaped to his feet, thrust a revolver into Roy's hands, and whispered:

"Keep the sharpest lookout you know how on the skylight. If you see so much as a shadow, fire at once!"

"What are you going to do?"

"I hardly know yet awhile; but I've got a sort of an idea which may turn out to be a big thing."

Then, to the great surprise of both his companions, Ned began examining the partition which separated the cabin from the upper portion of the engine-room.

The inspection appeared to afford him considerable satisfaction, and he began cutting the highly polished moldings on either side the center panel with his pocket-knife.

This apparently useless destruction was more than Vance could witness in silence, and he asked quite sharply:

"What's come over you now?"

Ned placed placed his finger on his lips as a token that no noise should be made, and continued to work with feverish haste, stopping every now and then to make certain he was not heard by any one who might chance to be on the opposite side of the wood-work.

During an hour he labored industriously, and then there was an expression of the most intense satisfaction on his face as he went softly to Vance's post of duty, beckoning for Roy to join them.

"That bulkhead is only made of thin boards," he said in a whisper, "and I have cut away the

moldings until the center panel can be pulled out in a few seconds."

"Well, what does that amount to?" Vance asked impatiently.

"It will be possible to get into the engine-room, and if that can be done without raising an alarm, I count on regaining possession of the steamer with but precious little trouble."

"How?" both boys asked in the same breath.

"Here is the scheme, and mind that you understand it perfectly, for there will be no opportunity to explain matters after we begin operations. There is a speaking-tube from this room to the pilot-house, isn't there?"

"Yes," Vance replied wonderingly. "Father had it put in so he could talk to the man at the wheel without being obliged to go on deck."

"Very well: when I give the word, you must whistle through and claim to want to talk with Manuel. That will bring him up to the pilot-house. Then you are to ask him on what terms he will agree to set us adrift at some point where we can reach Key West without difficulty——"

"But we mustn't think of leaving the yacht until it becomes absolutely necessary," Roy exclaimed.

"Wait till I finish. You are are to keep on trying to make a trade with Manuel until you hear me

whistle, and then you can stop. While he is there the sailing master will be at the wheel as a matter of course, which leaves no one but the steward and the engineer below. I shall pull out the panel the moment you nod to show me Manuel has come to the tube. Then each of us carrying a revolver, Vance and I will slip through. I count on surprising the engineer so much that I shall have the weapon leveled at his head before he knows we are anywhere near. Vance mustn't stop, but keep right on to the kitchen and make the darkey a prisoner in the same manner. Then I shall whistle; you must rush down as quickly as possible and secure all the hatches leading to the upper deck, and with one of the revolvers run back here to shoot the first person who attempts to get in this way."

"But we shall be shut up below the same as we are here," Roy said thoughtfully.

"Yes, but it'll be for us to say whether the yacht shall go ahead or astern, and those fellows will be forced to come to our terms, for if a craft of any kind should heave in sight she'd be certain to bear down on us for the purpose of learning what was the matter, and then if the truth didn't get out it would be our own fault."

"It's a big scheme," said Vance approvingly, "only we had better understand beforehand what

is to be done if the engineer and steward don't give up when we cover them with the revolvers."

"In such a case there must be no hesitation about shooting them at once. By that time we shall have gone so far that it will be the only way of saving our own lives."

"Let's begin immediately," Vance said eagerly.

"Wait till I fasten the cabin doors on the inside so they can't get in that way without considerable trouble," Ned replied as he stole softly and noiselessly toward the companion-way.

Three minutes later everything was in readiness for the bold scheme, and as Vance and Ned stationed themselves in front of the partially loosened panel, Roy whistled through the tube.

It was nearly a minute before he received any reply, and then he nodded his head to show that the interpreter had spoken.

Ned looked at his companion to make certain the latter had his weapon ready, and dexterously inserting the blade of his knife in the crevices of the wood-work, succeeded in wrenching out the panel with but little noise.

It can safely be said that their hearts were beating furiously as the two boys darted through the opening thus made and ran swiftly down the iron ladder which led to that portion of the yacht where

it was necessary the engineer should remain in order to attend to the machinery.

The man looked up in surprise at the sound of the hurried footsteps, and before he had an opportunity to speak a word Ned was aiming the revolver directly at him as he said in a low, stern tone:

"Up with your hands, quick, or I shall fire! I shan't have the slightest hesitation about shooting you as I would a dog!"

The fellow had obeyed at the first glimpse of the weapon, and Ned stepped aside slightly in order to let Vance pass him, saying as he did so:

"Bring the darkey back here as quick as you can!"

Then turning to his prisoner, for the man had shown the white feather instantly he was at the boy's mercy, he added, "Catch that bar above your head and hold on there. Remember that at the least movement I shall shoot. I ought to do that at once, for pirates like you are not worth the trouble necessary to keep them prisoners."

It could be seen that the man understood English from the alacrity with which he obeyed, and when he was grasping one of the spare steering-rods in such a manner as to raise himself slightly from the deck, Ned held the revolver at his head with one hand, while with the other he searched the fellow's pockets.

A pair of wicked-looking brass-knuckles was the result of this search, and then Ned took from the engineer's belt a keen-edged knife, both of which articles he threw into the furnace-room.

This work had but just been completed when Vance entered the apartment, driving the darkey in front of him, and never did a black face show more evidences of fear than at this moment.

"Back that fellow against this one!" Ned said sharply as Vance appeared, "and see how quick you can lash them together. I'll stand ready to kill the first one who makes any kick."

Vance went to work as expeditiously as if he had always been accustomed to such tasks.

First he hastily unbuckled the belts of both, and with them made a strap of sufficient length to go around the prisoners while their arms were lowered. Then, running back to the forward cabin, he brought out a quantity of ratline stuff, with which he proceeded to do them up in a perfect network.

Ned did not wait until the task was wholly accomplished.

When Vance had so far secured them that it was impossible either could do anything toward effecting his release, Ned ran to first one companion-way and then the other until in less than a couple of minutes he had them well secured.

The upper door leading from the engine-room was the only point at which those on deck could gain an entrance without considerable labor, and the greater portion of this being glass, he thought it possible that in the first frenzy of rage Manuel might attempt something of the kind.

Hastily dragging a couple of mattresses from the state-rooms, he placed these against the door in such a manner that they would serve as a screen to whoever might be standing there as sentinel.

"She's ours, or, at least, the lower portion of her is, and I reckon those villains will have mighty hard work to search for treasure now!" he cried, and Vance, who had finished his task, came from the engine-room.

"Is it safe to leave things alone there?"

"Yes, there's plenty of water in the glass, the fires are all right, and the prisoners lashed up so tight that it'll be hard work for them to so much as wink."

"Then we'll notify our particular friends in the wheel-house that we don't care about running on this course any longer," and Ned led the way to the state-room where Roy, looking thoroughly frightened, was yet parleying with Manuel.

"Is it all right?" he asked in a whisper

"Snug and neat a trick as you ever saw," Ned replied, and then taking his station at the tube, he

cried, "Say, my piratical friend Manuel, we've concluded that we don't care to give this craft up to you without a struggle, and while Roy was talking with you to make certain you didn't get into danger, Vance and I had an interview with your two chums below. Now we have concluded that we will shut off steam awhile, because of a very grave suspicion that the yacht is not headed for Key West."

An exclamation of rage and astonishment could be heard by all, and then the sharp click of the cover told that the interpreter had left very suddenly to ascertain if the story was true.

"We may get a chance to shoot at him again," Ned cried as he sprang to the barricade of mattresses. "Vance, you attend to the after companionway, and let Roy shut off the steam. Look lively, all hands, for now is the best chance we shall have."

The boy was willing to take many risks for the purpose of ending the struggle speedily, and stood peering out from the edges of the mattresses where he could see any one who came to starboard of the deck-houses.

His companions obeyed the commands so hurriedly given, and in a few seconds the throbbing of the screw ceased as Roy shut off the supply of steam.

CHAPTER XXII.

SUCCESS.

The machinery had hardly ceased moving before Ned saw a target at which to aim.

The worthy Manuel was creeping as stealthily as a cat to the engine-room door, and before he could stretch out his hand to grasp the knob a bullet struck his arm, calling forth a wild shriek of pain.

There was no opportunity for a second shot, for the fellow disappeared from view with remarkable celerity, and Ned muttered to himself:

"It's better to disable them than have the thought always before a fellow that he has killed a human being."

"I reckon by the sound that you hit the mark," Vance cried from his station in the cabin.

"It was Manuel again, and this time I reckon he'll find it mighty hard work to use a revolver, unless he's left-handed."

"Now what are we to do?"

"Hold on as we are. We can lose nothing by

lying here, and they may find themselves in trouble if a revenue cruiser should happen along; even a merchantman might think it worth while to make it hot for them."

Roy, having done as he was bidden, joined Ned.

"You know something about an engine, don't you?"

"Either Vance or I can start or stop her now that she is in running order, and I reckon it won't be a hard job to keep the steam up."

"There's no danger of her exploding?"

"Not a bit. The steam will blow off itself if the pressure gets too heavy."

"Then I reckon we can stick it out as long as they can. Suppose you take a look at all the hatches and make certain I fastened them securely?"

Roy went below at once, and until he returned not a sound could be heard from the wheel-house, where the two pirates were, unless they had seen fit to sneak along the port side in the hope of getting a shot at one of the boys.

Then the whistle was heard, and Ned motioned for Roy to attend to it.

"Sing out what they say, so all hands will have a chance of deciding any question which may come up."

Roy went into the room and an instant later cried:

"He says the yacht is drifting on to a reef, and will be ashore in ten minutes if we don't go ahead."

"Tell him nothing will suit us better than to have her there!" Vance cried angrily, and Ned shouted cheerily:

"It's all a lie, for even if they have been running up the island we have nothing to fear while the wind holds as it did when we started."

Roy repeated Vance's words, and added on his own account:

"There is no use for you to shout through this tube, for we don't care to make any trade with you, unless it should be on the basis of your leaving the yacht at once."

"Will you put us ashore if we agree to give up our weapons?

Roy repeated the question to his companions, and Ned said:

"We can't afford to run the risk of their treachery. If they want to take to the small boat, we'll allow them the chance of getting into her; but it must be done mighty quick."

There was no reply to this decision for a long while, and Roy had gone into the engine-room to assure himself things were all right there, when the whistle was heard again.

Neither Vance nor Ned dared to answer it lest it should be a trick similar to the one they played a short time previous with such good success, and it was necessary to wait until Roy returned.

Then the following conversation ensued, Manuel, as a matter of course, being the spokesman at the wheel-house end of the tube:

"We are willing to admit that we are beaten, and will take to the small boat at once if you send our friends up."

Ned dictated the reply:

"It can't be done. Go alone if you choose, but they stay where they are until we reach port or are overhauled by some craft, when you will have a chance to explain how you happen to be on deck with everybody else holding the fort below."

"Then we shall stay here, and it may be you'll have a chance to fight fire after we get ready to take to the small boat."

This threat had the effect of frightening Roy somewhat, but Vance cried positively:

"They won't dare to do anything of the kind while their chums are in the hold. Besides, I'd rather take my chances of fighting fire than of letting them loose. What would prevent them from doing the same thing after their friends were freed?"

"That's so!" Ned cried. "Here's a good trade for them! If they'll get into the small boat and push off where we can see them, we'll let the others go one at a time. They can swim to the small boat, and thus save themselves from spending quite a while in jail."

Roy repeated the words, and a few moments later, to the surprise of all, Manuel cried:

"We're in a tight place, and are willing to accept the offer. When shall we start?"

"He's up to some mischief now or I'm a Dutchman!" Ned exclaimed in a low tone, and added: "Tell them to leave at once, and to push off thirty or forty yards on the port side."

"Do you think it's safe?" Vance asked nervously.

"We'd better take the chances than hang 'round here two or three days. I believe I can outwit them by working lively."

Roy repeated the proposition, and Manuel replied:

"Then we'll start at once, for it will take us nearly all night to pull back to the island."

"Now, Vance, keep your eyes open and be ready to run to the wheel-house on the starboard side," Ned said quickly, and he waited at his post until the sound of footsteps on the deck told that the two men had gone aft.

Then he hurriedly joined Vance, and the latter whispered nervously:

"They have got at least one revolver, and probably two between them. We should have insisted on taking the weapons, otherwise they may fire on us while we are getting under way."

"That's exactly what I count on their trying to do, but I reckon they won't make very much by it," Ned said as he went into the port state-room aft. "Keep a sharp watch there until the boat pushes off, and then get into the wheel-house as lively as you know how."

It was evidently a portion of Manuel's scheme to play fair until his companions should be with him, when he probably intended to try something else.

Ned had opened the bull's-eye a few inches to enable him to see what was going on, and when the men in the boat came within his range of vision he said to Vance:

"Now is your time to get into the wheel-house. Be careful to keep out of sight, and don't stand erect until we are beyond range."

"Now send over our friends!" Manuel shouted.

"You shall have them as soon as we can make the necessary arrangements," Ned replied as he pushed the muzzle of his weapon through the aperture. "For fear you might take a notion to

board us again, or send a few bullets at the man at the wheel, I shall stand right here ready to kill you whenever either of your party makes a threatening gesture. Bring up the prisoners, Roy."

It was some moments before this order could be obeyed, owing to the network of ropes, but they were finally released and driven through the cabin, Roy marching behind with the heavy starting-bar ready to strike down the first one who attempted to show fight.

"See that they jump together," Ned said, still keeping his eyes fixed on the boat, where Manuel was busily engaged heaping maledictions on the heads of the boys because his plans were not working exactly to suit him. "Come back here instantly they are in the water."

Roy gave the word for the march to be resumed, and the prisoners rushed on deck after the companion-way door had been forced by the aid of the bar.

A moment later a loud splash told that they had leaped together, and as Roy came at full speed below, Ned cried:

"Start her as quick as possible. A few seconds means everything to us just now!"

The men in the water swam directly toward the boat, and as if to pick them up at the earliest pos-

sible moment, the sailing master pulled toward them.

"That's their game, to board us again, thinking we can't start the engine," Ned muttered to himself. "Manuel fancies he has released his chums, and that we are still in his power."

Nervous as Ned was, it seemed as if the screw would never revolve.

The men had been pulled on board the boat and the sailing master was rowing toward the bow of the yacht with all speed, probably intending to board from there.

"Hold on or I shall shoot!" Ned cried, and the words had hardly been spoken before the little craft was so far ahead that he could no longer see her.

"Hurry up there unless you are willing we shall take those fellows aboard again!" Ned cried as he ran to the engine-room door, and then, tearing away the barricade he had erected, rushed on to the deck.

A bullet whistled past his head as he emerged, and on shrinking back he understood that the machinery was in motion.

"Give it to her for all she's worth!" he shouted excitedly, running through the cabin to the main companion-way, and just as he was where he could look out, the boat swept past within half a dozen feet of the stern.

In the bow of the little craft was the darkey, who had been trying to gain a hold of the yacht as she moved swiftly ahead.

"We've done it by the skin of our teeth!" he cried sufficiently loud for Roy to hear as he ran forward once more, and shouted from the engine-room door, "take care of yourself, Vance! They are most likely ready to shoot."

Three minutes later he ventured on deck, and looking far astern, saw the pirates sitting motionless in the boat as if dazed at the very successful manner in which their villainous scheme had been frustrated.

It seemed incredible that the little craft could have traversed such a distance in so short a time, but there was no disputing the fact, and Ned set up a shout of triumph, in which he was joined both from the wheel-house and engine-room.

Then he ran to where Vance, having just risen to his feet, was swinging the yacht around as if to intercept a small craft which was running to the westward.

"That explains why those fellows were so anxious to gain possession of the craft at once that they were willing to accede to our terms in the slight hope of getting the best of us. Unless I'm very much mistaken that is a Key West pilot-boat, which

has been up the coast somewhere, and we had better speak her."

Vance was not mistaken.

Half an hour later they had overhauled the craft and taken on board a reliable pilot, who promised they should be at anchor at Key West before midnight, and, what was better still, he kept his word to the letter.

Between them Vance and Roy ran the engine, and it is safe to say both felt a sense of the most intense relief when they heard the signal to slow down, followed by a command to Ned to "clear away the anchor."

It yet lacked a quarter of twelve when the mighty splash told that the Zoe was in the home port once more, and her capture nothing more dangerous than some hideous nightmare which is quickly forgotten.

Vance and Roy were on shore very soon after sunrise next morning, and almost the first person they met was the former's father.

The party had heard at New York of the fears which were entertained concerning the safety of the Zoe, and passage was taken on the Key West steamer at once.

They had arrived the evening previous, and Mr. Stewart had left the hotel thus early in order to

hire a craft of some kind to make a tour of the keys in search of some tidings of the missing ones.

Now that there is no possibility there can be any trouble regarding the Zoe or her cargo, it is time to end the story.

There is really nothing more to say, except that Ned spent that winter with Vance and Roy, and very many short cruises did they take in the Zoe; but, putting them all together, there was not as much adventure in them as had been crowded into the first voyage.

As a matter of course the treasure was taken charge of by Mr. Stewart and Mr. Harland, and to-day, in a certain New York City bank, there is $8,000 as Ned's share of the treasure found on Spider Key.

Up to the present time the boy who the good people of Jonesboro had decided was certain to come to some bad end has never returned to that place, nor is he likely to do so until after he has passed an examination for Columbia College, which he, with Vance and Ned, intends to enter next term if possible.

Where is the Zoe?

That question cannot be answered, although it is very probable she is in the vicinity of Key West; but if any of the readers should keep a sharp look-

out during the coming summer, it is more than likely they will see a jaunty little steam craft, bearing the same name, which is owned by Ned, Vance, and Roy, having been purchased with a portion of the money found in the old hulk on Spider Key.

THE END.

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Here is a story that will warm every boy's heart. There is mystery enough to keep any lad's imagination wound up to the highest pitch. The scene of the story lies west of the Mississippi River, in the days when emigrants made their perilous way across the great plains to the land of gold. One of the startling features of the book is the attack upon the wagon train by a large party of Indians. Our hero is a lad of uncommon nerve and pluck, a brave young American in every sense of the word. He enlists and holds the reader's sympathy from the outset. Surrounded by an unknown and constant peril, and assisted by the unswerving fidelity of a stalwart trapper, a real rough diamond, our hero achieves the most happy results. Harry Castlemon has written many entertaining stories for boys, and it would seem almost superfluous to say anything in his praise, for the youth of America regard him as a favorite author.

"Carrots:" Just a Little Boy. By MRS. MOLESWORTH. With Illustrations by WALTER CRANE. 12mo, cloth, price 75 cents.

"One of the cleverest and most pleasing stories it has been our good fortune to meet with for some time. Carrots and his sister are delightful little beings, whom to read about is at once to become very fond of."—*Examiner.*

"A genuine children's book; we've seen 'em seize it, and read it greedily. Children are first-rate critics, and thoroughly appreciate Walter Crane's illustrations."—*Punch.*

Mopsa the Fairy. By JEAN INGELOW. With Eight page Illustrations. 12mo, cloth, price 75 cents.

"Mrs. Ingelow is, to our mind, the most charming of all living writers for children, and 'Mopsa' alone ought to give her a kind of pre-emptive right to the love and gratitude of our young folks. It requires genius to conceive a purely imaginary work which must of necessity deal with the supernatural, without running into a mere riot of fantastic absurdity; but genius Miss Ingelow has and the story of 'Jack' is as careless and joyous, but as delicate, as a picture of childhood."—*Eclectic.*

A Jaunt Through Java: The Story of a Journey to the Sacred Mountain. By EDWARD S. ELLIS. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

The central interest of this story is found in the thrilling adventures of two cousins, Hermon and Eustace Hadley, on their trip across the island of Java, from Samarang to the Sacred Mountain. In a land where the Royal Bengal tiger runs at large; where the rhinoceros and other fierce beasts are to be met with at unexpected moments; it is but natural that the heroes of this book should have a lively experience. Hermon not only distinguishes himself by killing a full-grown tiger at short range, but meets with the most startling adventure of the journey. There is much in this narrative to instruct as well as entertain the reader, and so deftly has Mr. Ellis used his material that there is not a dull page in the book. The two heroes are brave, manly young fellows, bubbling over with boyish independence. They cope with the many difficulties that arise during the trip in a fearless way that is bound to win the admiration of every lad who is so fortunate as to read their adventures.

Wrecked on Spider Island; or, How Ned Rogers Found the Treasure. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

A "down-east" plucky lad who ships as cabin boy, not from love of adventure, but because it is the only course remaining by which he can gain a livelihood. While in his bunk, seasick, Ned Rogers hears the captain and mate discussing their plans for the willful wreck of the brig in order to gain the insurance. Once it is known he is in possession of the secret the captain maroons him on Spider Island, explaining to the crew that the boy is afflicted with leprosy. While thus involuntarily playing the part of a Crusoe, Ned discovers a wreck submerged in the sand, and overhauling the timbers for the purpose of gathering material with which to build a hut finds a considerable amount of treasure. Raising the wreck; a voyage to Havana under sail; shipping there a crew and running for Savannah; the attempt of the crew to seize the little craft after learning of the treasure on board, and, as a matter of course, the successful ending of the journey, all serve to make as entertaining a story of sea-life as the most captious boy could desire.

Geoff and Jim: A Story of School Life. By ISMAY THORN. Illustrated by A. G. WALKER. 12mo, cloth, price 75 cents.

"This is a prettily told story of the life spent by two motherless bairns at a small preparatory school. Both Geoff and Jim are very lovable characters, only Jim is the more so; and the scrapes he gets into and the trials he endures will, no doubt, interest a large circle of young readers."—*Church Times.*

"This is a capital children's story, the characters well portrayed, and the book tastefully bound and well illustrated."—*Schoolmaster.*

"The story can be heartily recommended as a present for boys."—*Standard.*

The Castaways; or, On the Florida Reefs. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

This tale smacks of the salt sea. It is just the kind of story that the majority of boys yearn for. From the moment that the Sea Queen dispenses with the services of the tug in lower New York bay till the breeze leaves her becalmed off the coast of Florida, one can almost hear the whistle of the wind through her rigging, the creak of her straining cordage as she heels to the leeward, and feel her rise to the snow-capped waves which her sharp bow cuts into twin streaks of foam. Off Marquesas Keys she floats in a dead calm. Ben Clark, the hero of the story, and Jake, the cook, spy a turtle asleep upon the glassy surface of the water. They determine to capture him, and take a boat for that purpose, and just as they succeed in catching him a thick fog cuts them off from the vessel, and then their troubles begin. They take refuge on board a drifting hulk, a storm arises and they are cast ashore upon a low sandy key. Their adventures from this point cannot fail to charm the reader. As a writer for young people Mr. Otis is a prime favorite. His style is captivating, and never for a moment does he allow the interest to flag. In "The Castaways" he is at his best.

Tom Thatcher's Fortune. By HORATIO ALGER, JR. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

Like all of Mr. Alger's heroes, Tom Thatcher is a brave, ambitious, unselfish boy. He supports his mother and sister on meager wages earned as a shoe-pegger in John Simpson's factory. The story begins with Tom's discharge from the factory, because Mr. Simpson felt annoyed with the lad for interrogating him too closely about his missing father. A few days afterward Tom learns that which induces him to start overland for California with the view of probing the family mystery. He meets with many adventures. Ultimately he returns to his native village, bringing consternation to the soul of John Simpson, who only escapes the consequences of his villainy by making full restitution to the man whose friendship he had betrayed. The story is told in that entertaining way which has made Mr. Alger's name a household word in so many homes.

Birdie: A Tale of Child Life. By H. L. CHILDE-PEMBERTON. Illustrated by H. W. RAINEY. 12mo, cloth, price 75 cents.

"The story is quaint and simple, but there is a freshness about it that makes one hear again the ringing laugh and the cheery shout of children at play which charmed his earlier years."—*New York Express.*

Popular Fairy Tales. By the BROTHERS GRIMM. Profusely Illustrated, 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

"From first to last, almost without exception, these stories are delightful."—*Athenæum.*

With Lafayette at Yorktown: A Story of How Two Boys Joined the Continental Army. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

The two boys are from Portsmouth, N. H., and are introduced in August, 1781, when on the point of leaving home to enlist in Col. Scammell's regiment, then stationed near New York City. Their method of traveling is on horseback, and the author has given an interesting account of what was expected from boys in the Colonial days. The lads, after no slight amount of adventure, are sent as messengers—not soldiers—into the south to find the troops under Lafayette. Once with that youthful general they are given employment as spies, and enter the British camp, bringing away valuable information. The pictures of camp-life are carefully drawn, and the portrayal of Lafayette's character is thoroughly well done. The story is wholesome in tone, as are all of Mr. Otis' works. There is no lack of exciting incident which the youthful reader craves, but it is healthful excitement brimming with facts which every boy should be familiar with, and while the reader is following the adventures of Ben Jaffreys and Ned Allen he is acquiring a fund of historical lore which will remain in his memory long after that which he has memorized from text-books has been forgotten.

Lost in the Canon: Sam Willett's Adventures on the Great Colorado. By ALFRED R. CALHOUN. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

This story hinges on a fortune left to Sam Willett, the hero, and the fact that it will pass to a disreputable relative if the lad dies before he shall have reached his majority. The Vigilance Committee of Hurley's Gulch arrest Sam's father and an associate for the crime of murder. Their lives depend on the production of the receipt given for money paid. This is in Sam's possession at the camp on the other side of the cañon. A messenger is dispatched to get it. He reaches the lad in the midst of a fearful storm which floods the cañon. His father's peril urges Sam to action. A raft is built on which the boy and his friends essay to cross the torrent. They fail to do so, and a desperate trip down the stream ensues. How the party finally escape from the horrors of their situation and Sam reaches Hurley's Gulch in the very nick of time, is described in a graphic style that stamps Mr. Calhoun as a master of his art.

Jack: A Topsy Turvy Story. By C. M. CRAWLEY-BOEVEY. With upward of Thirty Illustrations by H. J. A. MILES. 12mo, cloth, price 75 cents.

"The illustrations deserve particular mention, as they add largely to the interest of this amusing volume for children. Jack falls asleep with his mind full of the subject of the fishpond, and is very much surprised presently to find himself an inhabitant of Waterworld, where he goes though wonderful and edifying adventures. A handsome and pleasant book."—*Literary World.*

Search for the Silver City: A Tale of Adventure in Yucatan. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

Two American lads, Teddy Wright and Neal Emery, embark on the steam yacht Day Dream for a short summer cruise to the tropics. Homeward bound the yacht is destroyed by fire. All hands take to the boats, but during the night the boat is cast upon the coast of Yucatan. They come across a young American named Cummings, who entertains them with the story of the wonderful Silver City, of the Chan Santa Cruz Indians. Cummings proposes with the aid of a faithful Indian ally to brave the perils of the swamp and carry off a number of the golden images from the temples. Pursued with relentless vigor for days their situation is desperate. At last their escape is effected in an astonishing manner. Mr. Otis has built his story on an historical foundation. It is so full of exciting incidents that the reader is quite carried away with the novelty and realism of the narrative.

Frank Fowler, the Cash Boy. By HORATIO ALGER, JR. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

Thrown upon his own resources Frank Fowler, a poor boy, bravely determines to make a living for himself and his foster-sister Grace. Going to New York he obtains a situation as cash boy in a dry goods store. He renders a service to a wealthy old gentleman named Wharton, who takes a fancy to the lad. Frank, after losing his place as cash boy, is enticed by an enemy to a lonesome part of New Jersey and held a prisoner. This move recoils upon the plotter, for it leads to a clue that enables the lad to establish his real identity. Mr. Alger's stories are not only unusually interesting, but they convey a useful lesson of pluck and manly independence.

Budd Boyd's Triumph; or, the Boy Firm of Fox Island. By WILLIAM P. CHIPMAN. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

The scene of this story is laid on the upper part of Narragansett Bay, and the leading incidents have a strong salt water flavor. Owing to the conviction of his father for forgery and theft, Budd Boyd is compelled to leave his home and strike out for himself. Chance brings Budd in contact with Judd Floyd The two boys, being ambitious and clear sighted, form a partnership to catch and sell fish. The scheme is successfully launched, but the unexpected appearance on the scene of Thomas Bagsley, the man whom Budd believes guilty of the crimes attributed to his father, leads to several disagreeable complications that nearly caused the lad's ruin. His pluck and good sense, however, carry him through his troubles. In following the career of the boy firm of Boyd & Floyd, the youthful reader will find a useful lesson—that industry and perseverance are bound to lead to ultimate success.

The Errand Boy; or, How Phil Brent Won Success. By HORATIO ALGER, JR. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

The career of "The Errand Boy" embraces the city adventures of a smart country lad who at an early age was abandoned by his father. Philip was brought up by a kind-hearted innkeeper named Brent. The death of Mrs. Brent paved the way for the hero's subsequent troubles. Accident introduces him to the notice of a retired merchant in New York, who not only secures him the situation of errand boy but thereafter stands as his friend. An unexpected turn of fortune's wheel, however, brings Philip and his father together. In "The Errand Boy" Philip Brent is possessed of the same sterling qualities so conspicuous in all of the previous creations of this delightful writer for our youth.

The Slate Picker: The Story of a Boy's Life in the Coal Mines. By HARRY PRENTICE. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

This is a story of a boy's life in the coal mines of Pennsylvania. There are many thrilling situations, notably that of Ben Burton's leap into the "lion's mouth"—the yawning shute in the breakers—to escape a beating at the hands of the savage Spilkins, the overseer. Gracie Gordon is a little angel in rags, Terence O'Dowd is a manly, sympathetic lad, and Enoch Evans, the miner-poet, is a big-hearted, honest fellow, a true friend to all whose burdens seem too heavy for them to bear. Ben Burton, the hero, had a hard road to travel, but by grit and energy he advanced step by step until he found himself called upon to fill the position of chief engineer of the Kohinoor Coal Company.

A Runaway Brig; or, An Accidental Cruise. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

"A Runaway Brig" is a sea tale, pure and simple, and that's where it strikes a boy's fancy. The reader can look out upon the wide shimmering sea as it flashes back the sunlight, and imagine himself afloat with Harry Vandyne, Walter Morse, Jim Libby and that old shell-back, Bob Brace, on the brig Bonita, which lands on one of the Bahama keys. Finally three strangers steal the craft, leaving the rightful owners to shift for themselves aboard a broken-down tug. The boys discover a mysterious document which enables them to find a buried treasure, then a storm comes on and the tug is stranded. At last a yacht comes in sight and the party with the treasure is taken off the lonely key. The most exacting youth is sure to be fascinated with this entertaining story.

Fairy Tales and Stories. By HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN. Profusely Illustrated, 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

"If I were asked to select a child's library I should name these three volumes 'English,' 'Celtic,' and 'Indian Fairy Tales,' with Grimm and Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales."—*Independent.*

The Island Treasure; or, Harry Darrel's Fortune. By FRANK H. CONVERSE. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

Harry Darrel, an orphan, having received a nautical training on a school-ship, is bent on going to sea with a boyish acquaintance named Dan Plunket. A runaway horse changes his prospects. Harry saves Dr. Gregg from drowning and the doctor presents his preserver with a bit of property known as Gregg's Island, and makes the lad sailing-master of his sloop yacht. A piratical hoard is supposed to be hidden somewhere on the island. After much search and many thwarted plans, at last Dan discovers the treasure and is the means of finding Harry's father. Mr. Converse's stories possess a charm of their own which is appreciated by lads who delight in good healthy tales that smack of salt water.

The Boy Explorers: The Adventures of Two Boys in Alaska. By HARRY PRENTICE. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

Two boys, Raymond and Spencer Manning, travel from San Francisco to Alaska to join their father in search of their uncle, who, it is believed, was captured and detained by the inhabitants of a place called the "Heart of Alaska." On their arrival at Sitka the boys with an Indian guide set off across the mountains. The trip is fraught with perils that test the lads' courage to the utmost. Reaching the Yukon River they build a raft and float down the stream, entering the Mysterious River, from which they barely escape with their lives, only to be captured by natives of the Heart of Alaska. All through their exciting adventures the lads demonstrate what can be accomplished by pluck and resolution, and their experience makes one of the most interesting tales ever written.

The Treasure Finders: A Boy's Adventures in Nicaragua. By JAMES OTIS. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

Roy and Dean Coloney, with their guide Tongla, leave their father's indigo plantation to visit the wonderful ruins of an ancient city. The boys eagerly explore the dismantled temples of an extinct race and discover three golden images cunningly hidden away. They escape with the greatest difficulty; by taking advantage of a festive gathering they seize a canoe and fly down the river. Eventually they reach safety with their golden prizes. Mr. Otis is the prince of story tellers, for he handles his material with consummate skill. We doubt if he has ever written a more entertaining story than "The Treasure Finders."

Household Fairy Tales. By the BROTHERS GRIMM. Profusely Illustrated, 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

"As a collection of fairy tales to delight children of all ages this work ranks second to none."—*Daily Graphic.*

Dan the Newsboy. By HORATIO ALGER, JR. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

The reader is introduced to Dan Mordaunt and his mother living in a poor tenement, and the lad is pluckily trying to make ends meet by selling papers in the streets of New York. A little heiress of six years is confided to the care of the Mordaunts. At the same time the lad obtains a position in a wholesale house. He soon demonstrates how valuable he is to the firm by detecting the bookkeeper in a bold attempt to rob his employers. The child is kidnaped and Dan tracks the child to the house where she is hidden, and rescues her. The wealthy aunt of the little heiress is so delighted with Dan's courage and many good qualities that she adopts him as her heir, and the conclusion of the book leaves the hero on the high road to every earthly desire.

Tony the Hero: A Brave Boy's Adventure with a Tramp. By HORATIO ALGER, JR. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

Tony, a sturdy bright-eyed boy of fourteen, is under the control of Rudolph Rugg, a thorough rascal, shiftless and lazy, spending his time tramping about the country. After much abuse Tony runs away and gets a job as stable boy in a country hotel. Tony is heir to a large estate in England, and certain persons find it necessary to produce proof of the lad's death. Rudolph for a consideration hunts up Tony and throws him down a deep well. Of course Tony escapes from the fate provided for him, and by a brave act makes a rich friend, with whom he goes to England, where he secures his rights and is prosperous. The fact that Mr. Alger is the author of this entertaining book will at once recommend it to all juvenile readers.

A Young Hero; or, Fighting to Win. BY EDWARD S. ELLIS. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

This story tells how a valuable solid silver service was stolen from the Misses Perkinpine, two very old and simple minded ladies. Fred Sheldon, the hero of this story and a friend of the old ladies, undertakes to discover the thieves and have them arrested. After much time spent in detective work, he succeeds in discovering the silver plate and winning the reward for its restoration. During the narrative a circus comes to town and a thrilling account of the escape of the lion from its cage, with its recapture, is told in Mr. Ellis' most fascinating style. Every boy will be glad to read this delightful book.

The Days of Bruce: A Story from Scottish History. By GRACE AGUILAR. Illustrated, 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

"There is a delightful freshness, sincerity and vivacity about all of Grace Aguilar's stories which cannot fail to win the interest and admiration of every lover of good reading."—*Boston Beacon.*

Tom the Bootblack; or, The Road to Success. By HORATIO ALGER, JR. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

A bright, enterprising lad was Tom the bootblack. He was not at all ashamed of his humble calling, though always on the lookout to better himself. His guardian, old Jacob Morton, died, leaving him a small sum of money and a written confession that Tom, instead of being of humble origin, was the son and heir of a deceased Western merchant, and had been defrauded out of his just rights by an unscrupulous uncle. The lad started for Cincinnati to look up his heritage. But three years passed away before he obtained his first clue. Mr. Grey, the uncle, did not hesitate to employ a ruffian to kill the lad. The plan failed, and Gilbert Grey, once Tom the bootblack, came into a comfortable fortune. This is one of Mr. Alger's best stories.

Captured by Zulus: A story of Trapping in Africa. By HARRY PRENTICE. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

This story details the adventures of two lads, Dick Elsworth and Bob Harvey, in the wilds of South Africa, for the purpose of obtaining a supply of zoological curiosities. By stratagem the Zulus capture Dick and Bob and take them to their principal kraal or village. The lads escape death by digging their way out of the prison hut by night. They are pursued, and after a rough experience the boys eventually rejoin the expedition and take part in several wild animal hunts. The Zulus finally give up pursuit and the expedition arrives at the coast without further trouble. Mr. Prentice has a delightful method of blending fact with fiction. He tells exactly how wild-beast collectors secure specimens on their native stamping grounds, and these descriptions make very entertaining reading.

Tom the Ready; or, Up from the Lowest. By RANDOLPH HILL. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

This is a dramatic narrative of the unaided rise of a fearless, ambitious boy from the lowest round of fortune's ladder—the gate of the poorhouse—to wealth and the governorship of his native State. Thomas Seacomb begins life with a purpose. While yet a schoolboy he conceives and presents to the world the germ of the Overland Express Co. At the very outset of his career jealousy and craft seek to blast his promising future. Later he sets out to obtain a charter for a railroad line in connection with the express business. Now he realizes what it is to match himself against capital. Yet he wins and the railroad is built. Only an uncommon nature like Tom's could successfully oppose such a combine. How he manages to win the battle is told by Mr. Hill in a masterful way that thrills the reader and holds his attention and sympathy to the end.

Roy Gilbert's Search: A Tale of the Great Lakes. By WM. P. CHIPMAN. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

A deep mystery hangs over the parentage of Roy Gilbert. He arranges with two schoolmates to make a tour of the Great Lakes on a steam launch. The three boys leave Erie on the launch and visit many points of interest on the lakes. Soon afterward the lad is conspicuous in the rescue of an elderly gentleman and a lady from a sinking yacht. Later on the cruise of the launch is brought to a disastrous termination and the boys narrowly escape with their lives. The hero is a manly, self-reliant boy, whose adventures will be followed with interest.

The Young Scout; The Story of a West Point Lieutenant. By EDWARD S. ELLIS. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

The crafty Apache chief Geronimo but a few years ago was the most terrible scourge of the southwest border. The author has woven, in a tale of thrilling interest, all the incidents of Geronimo's last raid. The hero is Lieutenant James Decker, a recent graduate of West Point. Ambitious to distinguish himself so as to win well-deserved promotion, the young man takes many a desperate chance against the enemy and on more than one occasion narrowly escapes with his life. The story naturally abounds in thrilling situations, and being historically correct, it is reasonable to believe it will find great favor with the boys. In our opinion Mr. Ellis is the best writer of Indian stories now before the public.

Adrift in the Wilds: The Adventures of Two Shipwrecked Boys. BY EDWARD S. ELLIS. 12mo, cloth, price, $1.00.

Elwood Brandon and Howard Lawrence, cousins and schoolmates, accompanied by a lively Irishman called O'Rooney, are en route for San Francisco. Off the coast of California the steamer takes fire. The two boys and their companion reach the shore with several of the passengers. While O'Rooney and the lads are absent inspecting the neighborhood O'Rooney has an exciting experience and young Brandon becomes separated from his party. He is captured by hostile Indians, but is rescued by an Indian whom the lads had assisted. This is a very entertaining narrative of Southern California in the days immediately preceding the construction of the Pacific railroads. Mr. Ellis seems to be particularly happy in this line of fiction, and the present story is fully as entertaining as anything he has ever written.

The Red Fairy Book. Edited by ANDREW LANG. Profusely Illustrated, 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

"A gift-book that will charm any child, and all older folk who have been fortunate enough to retain their taste for the old nursery stories."—*Literary World.*

The Boy Cruisers; or, Paddling in Florida. By St. George Rathborne. 12mo, cloth, price, $1.00.

Boys who like an admixture of sport and adventure will find this book just to their taste. We promise them that they will not go to sleep over the rattling experiences of Andrew George and Roland Carter, who start on a canoe trip along the Gulf coast, from Key West to Tampa, Florida. Their first adventure is with a pair of rascals who steal their boats. Next they run into a gale in the Gulf and have a lively experience while it lasts. After that they have a lively time with alligators and divers varieties of the finny tribe. Andrew gets into trouble with a band of Seminole Indians and gets away without having his scalp raised. After this there is no lack of fun till they reach their destination. That Mr. Rathborne knows just how to interest the boys is apparent at a glance, and lads who are in search of a rare treat will do well to read this entertaining story.

Guy Harris: The Runaway. By Harry Castlemon. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

Guy Harris lived in a small city on the shore of one of the Great Lakes. His head became filled with quixotic notions of going West to hunt grizzlies, in fact, Indians. He is persuaded to go to sea, and gets a glimpse of the rough side of life in a sailor's boarding house. He ships on a vessel and for five months leads a hard life. He deserts his ship at San Francisco and starts out to become a backwoodsman, but rough experiences soon cure him of all desire to be a hunter. At St. Louis he becomes a clerk and for a time he yields to the temptations of a great city. The book will not only interest boys generally on account of its graphic style, but will put many facts before their eyes in a new light. This is one of Castlemon's most attractive stories.

The Train Boy. By Horatio Alger, Jr. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

Paul Palmer was a wide-awake boy of sixteen who supported his mother and sister by selling books and papers on one of the trains running between Chicago and Milwaukee. He detects a young man named Luke Denton in the act of picking the pocket of a young lady, and also incurs the enmity of his brother Stephen, a worthless follow. Luke and Stephen plot to ruin Paul, but their plans are frustrated. In a railway accident many passengers are killed, but Paul is fortunate enough to assist a Chicago merchant, who out of gratitude takes him into his employ. Paul is sent to manage a mine in Custer City and executes his commission with tact and judgment and is well started on the road to business prominence. This is one of Mr. Alger's most attractive stories and is sure to please all readers.

Joe's Luck: A Boy's Adventures in California. By HORATIO ALGER, JR. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

Without a doubt Joe Mason was a lucky boy, but he deserved the golden chances that fell to his lot, for he had the pluck and ambition to push himself to the front. Joe had but one dollar in the world when he stood despondently on the California Mail Steamship Co.'s dock in New York watching the preparations incident to the departure of the steamer. The same dollar was still Joe's entire capital when he landed in the bustling town of tents and one-story cabins—the San Francisco of '51, and inside of the week the boy was proprietor of a small restaurant earning a comfortable profit. The story is chock full of stirring incidents, while the amusing situations are furnished by Joshua Bickford, from Pumpkin Hollow, and the fellow who modestly styles himself the "Rip-tail Roarer, from Pike Co., Missouri." Mr. Alger never writes a poor book, and "Joe's Luck" is certainly one of his best.

Three Bright Girls: A Story of Chance and Mischance. By ANNIE E. ARMSTRONG. With full page Illustrations by W. PARKINSON. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

By a sudden turn of fortune's wheel the three heroines of this story are brought down from a household of lavish comfort to meet the incessant cares and worries of those who have to eke out a very limited income. And the charm of the story lies in the cheery helpfulness of spirit developed in the girls by their changed circumstances; while the author finds a pleasant ending to all their happy makeshifts.

"The story is charmingly told, and the book can be warmly recommended as a present for girls."—*Standard.*

Giannetta: A Girl's Story of Herself. By ROSA MULHOLLAND. With full-page Illustrations by LOCKHART BOGLE. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

The daughter of a gentleman, who had married a poor Swiss girl, was stolen as an infant by some of her mother's relatives. The child having died, they afterward for the sake of gain substitute another child for it, and the changeling, after becoming a clever modeler of clay images, is suddenly transferred to the position of a rich heiress. She develops into a good and accomplished woman, and though the imposture of her early friends is finally discovered, she has gained too much love and devotion to be really a sufferer by the surrender of her estates.

"Extremely well told and full of interest. Giannetta is a true heroine—warm-hearted, self-sacrificing, and, as all good women nowadays are, largely touched with enthusiasm of humanity. The illustrations are unusually good. One of the most attractive gift books of the season."—*The Academy.*

Margery Merton's Girlhood. By ALICE CORKRAN. With full-page Illustrations by GORDON BROWNE. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

The experiences of an orphan girl who in infancy is left by her father—an officer in India—to the care of an elderly aunt residing near Paris. The accounts of the various persons who have an after influence on the story, the school companions of Margery, the sisters of the Conventual College of Art, the professor, and the peasantry of Fontainebleau, are singularly vivid. There is a subtle attraction about the book which will make it a great favorite with thoughtful girls.

"Another book for girls we can warmly commend. There is a delightful piquancy in the experiences and trials of a young English girl who studies painting in Paris."—*Saturday Review.*

Under False Colors: A Story from Two Girls' Lives. By SARAH DOUDNEY. With full-page Illustrations by G. G. KILBURNE. 12mo, cloth, price $1.00.

A story which has in it so strong a dramatic element that it will attract readers of all ages and of either sex. The incidents of the plot, arising from the thoughtless indulgence of a deceptive freak, are exceedingly natural, and the keen interest of the narrative is sustained from beginning to end.

"Sarah Doudney has no superior as a writer of high-toned stories—pure in style, original in conception, and with skillfully wrought out plots; but we have seen nothing equal in dramatic energy to this book."—*Christian Leader.*

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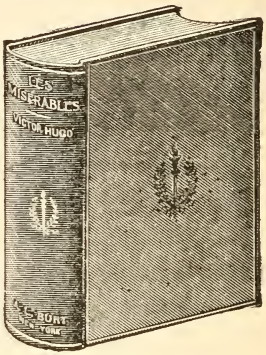

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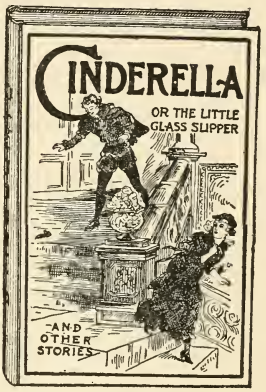

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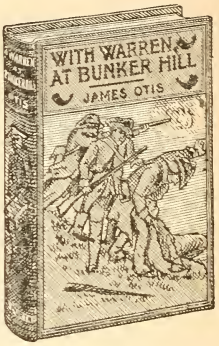

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